A CONFIDENT TOMORROW

BY
BRANDER
MATTHEWS

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"SO ABSORBED WAS HE IN THESE THOUGHTS"

A Confident To-Morrow

A Novel of New York

BY

BRANDER MATTHEWS

AUTHOR OF

"VIGNETTES OF MANHATTAN" "HIS FATHER'S SON"

"OUTLINES IN LOCAL COLOR" ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

BY WILLIAM L. JACOBS

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THIS STORY OF A GREAT CITY

Is Inscribed to

A GOOD CITIZEN

RICHARD WATSON GILDER

ILLUSTRATIONS

"SO ABSORBED WAS HE IN THESE THOUGHTS" . *Frontispiece*

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A CONFIDENT TO-MORROW

CHAPTER I

When at last the train stood still, and the impatient passengers poured forth and pressed forward as though a prize had been offered to the one who should first reach the ferry-boat, Frank Sartain found himself hastening ahead as eagerly as any of the others. He was glad of a chance to stretch his legs again, for he was weary with the two nights spent on the cars, and with the long intervening day. He felt draggled and dirty from his journey; and as the procession of passengers came out into the open air, he drew a long breath, as though to cleanse his lungs. A breeze blew in from the river, damp but not chill, considering the time of the year. Sartain wondered if it were always as mild as this in New York in the middle of October.

He had not been East for several years; and even at best his acquaintance with the great city was confined to two or three chance visits when the college glee club had come down to give its annual concert. And now he was entering New York to stay; it was in New York hereafter that he was to wage the battle of life, and to fight his way to the front. He looked

at the men who were hurrying along briskly by his side; and he wondered whether he should ever see one of them again, and whether any of them would be competitors of his at some future day.

Although stairways led to the ground-floor of the ferry-house, the main stream of passengers swept along on the upper platform, which communicated with each of the ferry-slips. As a newspaper-man Sartain had kept up with the changes and improvements of New York, and though he had never seen a two-story ferry-boat, he was not surprised when he beheld little drawbridges lowered at the ends of the platform on which he and his fellow-travellers were massed, so that they could cross directly to the upper deck of the boat.

There the panorama of New York unrolled itself before the young man's questioning eyes. He drew a long breath again; and unconsciously he set his teeth with determination. He knew that the promised land lay before him; and that whether he should ever possess it or not depended upon his own strength and his own courage. He felt himself girded for the combat, and he was eager for the onset. He likened himself to Eugène de Rastignac, gazing bitterly down on Paris the afternoon of old Goriot's funeral, and then going to dine with the dead man's daughter; and he wistfully wondered if he were ever to meet with contrasts as dramatic in New York as Rastignac in Paris.

The rain, after racing with the train across the Alleghanies the day before, had reached the Hudson first, and had spent itself before Frank Sartain arrived in sight of the river. The sky overhead was now flecked with scattered clouds; and the stern and serrated

"THE PANORAMA OF NEW YORK UNFOLDED FIRST B"

profile of New York stood out against a gray bank low on the horizon.

As the ferry-boat started on its brief voyage across the river, the sun came out hesitatingly and shone in the young man's eyes. He turned to the right and beheld the stalwart figure of Liberty rising from the broad waters of the bay. As far as he could see, craft were in motion; sloops were slipping up the river with the wind and the tide in their favor; spiteful tugs were spitting steam as they darted in every direction; ferry-boats of all colors were crossing each other's tracks incessantly; huge floats loaded down with freight-cars were sliding slowly from the Jersey shore to the Long Island; through all this seeming confusion an immense ocean-steamer was majestically threading its way to its pier a mile farther up the stream. As he looked at these vessels of one sort or another, all steadily at their regular work and all serving the city that lay spread out before him in its sullen might, Sartain was seized with a sudden sense of the immense power of New York. Hopeful as he was by temperament and by force of youth and health and energy, there went over him a momentary thrill of doubt and loneliness. Who was he that he should dare to go down into that arena, to fight his way to the front all alone?

He was a sturdy young fellow as he stood there in the front of the ferry-boat, pulling at the point of his brown beard. His eyes were brown also, and gentle and even appealing. But the eyebrows were resolute and straight, and the chin was firm; and so was the mouth hidden by the drooping brown mustache. His face was thin, and his complexion sallow, although

this may have been due to his two nights in the cars. He wore a loose suit of clothes that did not fit him; and although not old, the trousers were already a little baggy at the knees.

Then he straightened himself up, and his glance swept the length of the city that lay before him. The glare of the sun was gilding the water that washed the foot of the Battery; and behind the massive profile of New York the bank of leaden cloud was already lighter than it had been when the ferry-boat started. As he looked and noted how one tall building lifted its slim shaft in air, and how another had heaved its huge bulk upward, while yet a third spread aloft the spider's-web of its incompleted steel framework, he thought that it would not greatly task the imagination to liken New York to a walled city with towering forts and broad citadels thrust up squarely, and with an arm of the salt sea for its moat. He wondered again how he should fare within its gates, and how long it would take him to win his spurs in its tilt-yard. Whatever the result of the tourney, he was going forward boldly and blithely, and with no glance backward.

He recalled Arthur Pendennis rolling up to London on the top of a coach, a proper enough mode of entry for the future author of the romance of *Walter Lorraine,* but far too old-fashioned for a veritist like Sartain, who had in his trunk the manuscript of a realistic novel, *Dust and Ashes.*

When the ferry-boat entered the slip on the New York side, the passengers revealed the same impatience to get off that they had shown to get on a few minutes earlier. Sartain looked at the men and women about him, and he could see no reason why they should all

hurry thus. It was then about half-past nine, and there were few laboring people or factory hands on the boat; for such as these the hour was too late. The men were apparently lawyers or bank clerks or the like, not compelled to be at their offices before ten o'clock. The women were well dressed, so it seemed to Sartain—far better dressed than the women were whom he had left behind him in Topeka; and, while some of them may have been on their way to their desks, the most of them struck him as coming to the city merely to shop or to visit, or perhaps—as it was Saturday—to go to the theatre in the afternoon. Yet they were all rushing ahead, as though every minute had to be paid for separately. Impatiently they pressed through the ferry-house, crossing the street on a long covered bridge, and descending at last to the sidewalk by a twisting stairway inside the house on the corner.

When Sartain came out on the street below and saw how dirty it was, and how slippery with mud, his opinion of the city fell. The needless ugliness of the surroundings, the sordid grimness of the water-front generally, the shabbiness in particular of the stands that backed up against some of the buildings, all detracted not a little from the impression of dignified strength which New York had made upon him when seen from afar.

Nobody else seemed to remark upon the meanness of the thoroughfare—perhaps because nobody cared to give it any attention. Everybody pushed forward, up the street towards Broadway, stumbling on sticky sidewalks which were crowded with projecting show-cases and with obtrusive fruit-stands. By a resolute effort Sartain slackened his pace. There was no need that

he should hurry. He thought to let the other passengers by his boat get ahead of him, so that he should not be urged forward in this frantic fashion, so he loitered by a window in which a man in white coat and cap was baking buckwheat-cakes over a gas griddle. But though he lingered there five minutes, and then wasted two or three more gazing into a florist's doorway at the potted chrysanthemums and at the bulbs sprouting in damp gravel, there was no slackening in the flood of passers-by. Soon he recognized the folly of his attempt, realizing that the stream of humanity flows ceaselessly through the streets of the great city, and that the crowds which pour in every morning, by ferry, by rail, and on foot, lose themselves immediately in the immense current of the metropolis.

Then he went up the street towards Broadway, and under one darkening elevated-railroad track, and then under another; the sun beamed forth again, and the sky above was blue; and he quickened his gait and walked as swiftly as any of the New Yorkers who jostled along by his side. The noise of the city rose all about him like the call of some strange beast, hungry and insatiable, and insisting upon its human sacrifice night and morning. It was not a shrill cry, nor a petulant; it was a deep, reverberating roar, appalling when its significance was seized. Yet nobody noticed it except Sartain, as he stood at the corner of Broadway and looked up and down. In his ears it rang so loud that it almost forced him to raise his hands and try vainly to shut it out. Then he straightened himself again—he was doing his best to break off a habit of stooping; he drew a long breath once more, and resolutely set aside such idle fancies. For a deter-

mined realist, as he knew himself to be, it was a vain imagination, and most misleading, to liken a modern city of America to an unknown monster of mythology.

The boarding-house where he had engaged a hall bedroom was in Irving Place, only a couple of blocks from Broadway. It was one of the brown-stone, high-stoop, four-story houses which make the middle of New York stupidly monotonous. Sartain had to ring the door-bell three times before any one came to let him in.

At last the door was opened by a red-faced, middle-aged Irish woman, who told him that the landlady had gone out to do her marketing for Sunday, but that his room was all ready for him. Then she walked wearily up-stairs before him. A pungent odor of boiled cabbage went up with them also.

He was shown into the front hall bedroom on the third floor—the little room that was to be his home for a year or more. Although bare and untidy, it was fairly clean; and there was a bath-room on the same landing. When the rheumatic attendant had limped down to her kitchen again, he looked about him and mentally fitted his belongings into the confined space. He was glad to see that there was a little table in the window, at which he could write; and the gas-jet was near to it.

Within an hour the expressman brought his trunk. He took out the manuscript of *Dust and Ashes*, reread two or three of the chapters lovingly and made a few corrections in pencil. Then he unpacked his books and his writing materials, and arranged his possessions as best he could. By the time he had got everything

settled it was one o'clock, and a bell down below rang for luncheon.

As he went down-stairs he thought of the Maison Vauquier, and wondered whether he should have a Vautrin for a fellow-boarder. Admirer of Balzac as he was, he could not but admit that a convict in disguise was not a probable inmate of any boarding-house; and it struck him more forcibly than ever before that not a little romanticism sometimes colored the great Parisian novelist's realism.

The dining-room was in the front basement, a little below the level of the sidewalk. Down the centre there was one long table with ten or a dozen places, and in each of the two windows were little round tables with three chairs. He found that his seat was at the main table, opposite a mature and yellow-haired lady who gave lessons in elocution, and between a portly old gentleman who looked as though he might be president of a bank and a pert young man in a bicycle suit. To these neighbors the landlady, a lank and washed-out widow, introduced him; and before he had eaten his helping of the corn-beef and cabbage which constituted the luncheon they had become very friendly, had told him much about themselves, and had asked him many leading questions about himself. They also gave him abundant information about the other boarders, few of whom, it appeared, were ever at home for lunch.

"You've come to the right house if you want Society. Hasn't he, Mrs. Greer?" said the bicycle young man, appealing to the landlady. "Why, there ain't a Sunday in the month scarcely when you won't see Miss De Lancey's name in the 'Gossip of the Gay

World'; and Mr. Wornum, here, he had a very responsible position down in Wall Street—and he'd be there now, only the firm busted last spring. And as for me—well, if you want to see life, what I can't show you in this old town ain't worth looking at, that's all! And it ain't a song-and-dance I'm giving you either."

When the new-comer rose from the table the bicycle young man hastily rolled his napkin, thrust it into a bone ring, and followed Sartain into the hall.

"Say," he began, lowering his voice, "I'll give you a steer. Don't let old Wornum touch you."

"Touch me!" repeated Sartain, a little doubtfully.

"That's what I say. Don't let him touch you for a dollar. Last summer there was a young fellow from Frisco had the room you are in, and before he'd been here a week old Wornum had pulled his leg for ten. That's why I'm givin' you a pointer—see?" and the bicycle young man laughed pleasantly. "You keep all your roll in your own pocket, and maybe I'll want to borrow some of it myself some day!"

After luncheon Sartain smoked a cigar in Union Square, observing the procession of city life as it passed before his eyes. A little before three o'clock he walked to Fifth Avenue to the huge building where were the offices of Carington & Company, the publishers for whom he was to go to work on Monday morning. He found the offices on the tenth floor, but they were locked; and on one of the glass doors, which bore the name of the firm, a card announced: "We close at Two, Saturdays."

When Sartain had descended again to the avenue he noticed that crowds lined the sidewalk as if in expectancy. He asked a policeman the reason why, and was

told that all the National Guard of the city was going to parade that afternoon.

It was a beautiful day, after a night of rain, and the broad avenue was brilliant in the October sunshine. Before he reached Fortieth Street he heard the martial rattle of the drum. When the cadet gray of the Seventh came in sight and was recognized by the crowd and cheered, Sartain's pulse beat faster and his heart throbbed within him. He recalled Theodore Winthrop's account of the way that regiment had marched down Broadway more than thirty years before ; and he scanned the files as they passed, to see if he could discover a man old enough to have been in the ranks then, a comrade of the young author who fell before his first book had been published. Stirring as the warlike spectacle was, to Sartain its appeal was doubled by his recollection that the earlier march of the Seventh had its adequate record in literature.

He continued his walk up the avenue. He was going, by appointment, to call upon the distinguished novelist, Meredith Vivian, who had an apartment in one of the immense houses which faced the southern edge of the Park.

Sartain was a loyal admirer of Vivian's writings ; he had a profound reverence for that novelist's delicate art, for his mastery of form, for his sense of style, and for his unfailing ingenuity. The young man had in his pocket his letter of introduction to the elder craftsman, and he knew that Mr. Vivian expected him to call that afternoon ; and yet, now that the hour had come, a timidity seized him and the shyness returned that he hoped he had conquered. He said to himself that Mr. Vivian could have no interest whatever in a

young man who had been engaged for a few years on a Kansas newspaper, even if the young man had been on the editorial page, writing brevier, the last six months.

Thus analyzing his feelings, Sartain walked past the broad door of the stately apartment-house in which Mr. Vivian lived. Then he turned and again irresolutely went beyond the entrance. At last he straightened himself, drew a long breath, and pushed through the yielding glass door.

As he was about to let this door swing back he became conscious that a young lady was behind him, and he held it wide open for her to pass. She acknowledged this courtesy with an inclination of the head. She was slight and slim, and simply dressed. She wore a thick veil, so that he could not see her face in the semi-obscurity of the hall. He remarked that her walk was singularly graceful.

She entered the elevator just before him, and he thought she glanced at him curiously when he asked the elevator-boy on which floor Mr. Vivian lived.

The lad stopped the elevator at the sixth landing, and declared that Mr. Vivian's door was on the right.

When Sartain had pushed the electric button, he heard the elevator gate clang, and he discovered that the young lady was standing by his side. Then it struck him that perhaps she was one of Vivian's daughters, and a sudden hope sprang up within him that he might make her acquaintance, possibly that very afternoon.

The door was opened by a neat-looking maid in black, with a white apron and a white cap. When she saw the young lady standing there, she smiled and

said, "They are waiting for you, Miss Dircks; I've just taken in the tea-kettle."

Sartain caught himself regretting that the young lady was not the novelist's daughter, and fearing that now perhaps he might never see her again.

"Waiting for me, are they?" she answered, and the low notes of her voice charmed the young man, who was listening for it. "But I am on time—it's only a quarter to four now."

With that she disappeared within the door; and as Sartain's eyes followed her involuntarily he saw that she turned to the right.

The maid stood waiting for him to speak.

"Mr. Vivian?" he asked, not a little embarrassed, although he did not know why.

"Yes," she said, doubtfully. "What name shall I say?"

"Please give Mr. Vivian this letter," Sartain answered, "and here is my card."

She moved back so as to allow him to enter the small square vestibule, and closed the door behind him. Taking his card and the letter on a small salver, she was turning to go when her eye fell on three or four overcoats hanging on a hat-rack, and again she glanced back and looked Sartain over—very suspiciously, so it seemed to the young man, who flushed. Then she disappeared down a long passage to the left, leaving him standing alone in the vestibule.

In a minute she returned, and there was now no trace of suspicion in her manner.

"Mr. Vivian will see you," she said; "this way, please," and she preceded him down the long and dimly lighted corridor.

CHAPTER II

THE white-capped maid led the way down the gloomy passage, and Sartain followed her with hesitating steps.

Suddenly she stopped and opened a large door on the left, saying, "This is Mr. Vivian's room."

Sartain paused, blinking in the glare of the sunlight which came from the broad bow-window he now found himself to be facing. He was standing on the threshold of a snug and cheerful library, ruddy with the rays of the westering sun. A blue haze of smoke filled the room, and the new-comer was conscious at once of the acrid odor of Oriental tobacco.

With the features of Meredith Vivian, Sartain supposed himself to be familiar from the frequent portraits printed in the periodicals; but now he saw that none of these photographs had done justice to the good looks of the great novelist. He had before him a handsome man of perhaps fifty, well preserved, carrying himself easily, with a good figure, and so carefully dressed as to suggest to Sartain that perhaps the author he admired might be a bit of a dandy. And this suggestion added not a little to the embarrassment the young writer already felt in the presence of his elder.

"I had hoped you would come earlier, Mr. Sartain,"

said Vivian, as he shook hands with him heartily. "We have had half a dozen authors and artists here to lunch whom you might have liked to meet."

"Thank you," Sartain answered, delighted that he was at last actually in conversation with the distinguished man whom he had long followed from afar. "Thank you," he repeated, as he twisted the end of his beard a little nervously. "It was very good of you to be willing to see me at all. You must have so many demands on your time."

"When you have been a little while in New York," the novelist returned, with a slight laugh, "you will discover that busy men can always find time, and that it is only idle men who never have any leisure."

"Yes," said Sartain, thoughtfully, as he turned this paradox over in his mind, "I can see how that may be."

"But don't let's talk any more about that," the novelist declared cheerily; "I want to hear about you. Here, take that chair," and he indicated to Sartain a spacious leather-covered seat. "Help yourself to a cigar or a cigarette and then we can chat."

While they were making ready to smoke the young man had a chance again to examine the elder. What struck him most was the complete concordance between the man who actually sat before him and the novelist whose works he had read with pleasure and whose methods he had studied for his own advantage. Even the square-cut beard, carefully combed, and the accurately parted hair, seemed somehow characteristic.

"Do you like these cigarettes?" the host asked, as he dropped his wax match into a little silver ash-receiver on the table by his side. "If you would rather

have a cigar, now ?" And he indicated a box at his elbow.

"Oh, I don't mind," Sartain answered, awkwardly. "At least—I mean—this suits me very well, thank you. Indeed, it isn't often I have had a chance to smoke tobacco as delicate as this."

"If that's all right then," said Vivian, cordially, "tell me about yourself."

"About myself ?" echoed Sartain.

"Certainly," answered the elder man, smiling whimsically; "we all like to talk about ourselves, don't we ? I know I do. But you are the younger; and in all consultations the young men give their opinions first. Who are you ? Where were you born ? What education have you had ? What have you done ? What do you want to do ?"

"If you really care to hear about me," Sartain answered: "I think I can compact my biography into a very few sentences. I was born in 1868, at Wakefield; that's a little town in Rhode Island you never heard of, I suppose, but it's only three miles back from Narragansett Pier."

"Then I have driven through it," said Vivian. "It's a pretty place, as I remember it, and it looked prosperous. Are your parents living there now ?"

"My father died before I was ten," the young man answered, "and he left my mother little more than the house we lived in. She took boarders in summer, and we were able to make both ends meet. When I was sixteen my mother died. My uncle settled up our affairs for me, and he was lucky enough to sell the old house the next summer. After the payment of the mortgage I had about a thousand dollars, all told; and

to my satisfaction I found that this would be nearly enough to take me through Brown. I was in the class of '89."

"I think you look more mature than most men do so short a time after graduation," declared Vivian.

"Perhaps I am a little more mature," the young man admitted. "But then I have had more experience of life than most of my classmates. I played on the second nine two years, and I sang in the glee club, and I was one of the editors of the paper; yet all that was nothing compared with the work I did in the summer. Then I was a hack-driver at the Pier."

Here Sartain paused for a moment. Vivian looked at him keenly through the smoke of his cigar but said nothing.

"Of course that wasn't like driving a hack here in New York—but I didn't like it any better, I assure you," Sartain explained. "Still, I needed money, and that was as good a way to make it as any other. My uncle used to let me take his surrey three or four afternoons in the week, and I would go over to the Pier. Generally I managed to pick up two or three people who wanted to drive to Point Judith or to see the Gilbert Stuart place—and so I contrived to make about a hundred dollars every summer."

"That was an experience, certainly," said Vivian. "And I suppose your fares treated you just as the Summer Boarder always treats the Native—they acted just as if you had neither eyes nor ears?"

"I think that most of them did not consider me any more than they did the horse," Sartain answered, and his cheeks flushed.

"Yes," Vivian commented, "you must have had

an invaluable opportunity to discover how the other half lives—the other half that spends its summers in sea-side hotels. There's copy in it, of course."

Sartain laughed a little bitterly. "I didn't like it overmuch at the time, I can assure you, Mr. Vivian," he declared, hotly. "More than once I've felt like throwing back the pay in the face of the contemptible little snob who had hired me. I think it was that summer driving that opened my eyes to the hollowness of our boasted civilization!"

"I can well imagine that it might tend to do that," said the novelist, dryly.

"I know that I have detested Society people ever since!" Sartain continued. "I couldn't help feeling that there was something wrong in a social organization which tried to make me the inferior of a vulgar old woman who happened to have inherited a lot of money, when I was earning my living honestly and when her money was the result of her father's dishonesty!"

"I suppose that sometimes the money of your fare was rightfully come by?" suggested Vivian, mildly.

"Sometimes it must have been, of course," the young man admitted; "and sometimes I was treated not only like a human being, but like a gentleman. In fact, it was not often that people were discourteous, and I don't suppose I ought to complain. But I had thought that here in America all men were created free and equal, and it hurt me when I found that other people deemed me an inferior—other people whom I myself held as my inferiors."

"Probably I should not have liked that any better than you," said Vivian—"at your age, that is. At

mine, now, I have come to the conclusion that it is things like that which make human nature such an amusing spectacle."

Sartain was a little surprised that the novelist should treat a serious theme thus lightly. He was about to protest, but he changed his mind and held his tongue.

Apparently the host read the young man's thoughts on his face.

"As a good citizen," he continued, "I denounce the snob, of course, and I stand ready to command his instant execution — and even to be one of the firing squad. But as a novelist, now, I can't help thinking that this will be a monstrous world when the millennium comes, and all men are perfect."

Again Sartain, who believed in the immediate improvement of society, found himself struggling between his admiration for Vivian and his desire to bear testimony to the faith that was in him. Again he was silent merely from inability to say what he wanted to say, as he felt that it ought to be said.

"But don't let me check the ardor of youth," the novelist went on, "and let me be a warning to you. If you mean to be a reformer—and I suppose that there is nothing more beautiful in youth than its willingness to lead the forlorn-hope and to die in the last ditch—if you mean to be a reformer, as I have said, you must not let your sense of humor get the better of you. You must take it by the throat while it is in the gristle and strangle it. A highly developed sense of humor will prevent a man from making a fool of himself—and all the progress of the world is due to men who didn't care how foolish they looked, so long as they gained their point."

The elder man paused as though for a reply; Sartain turned over in his mind this last proposition, and declared that he saw what Mr. Vivian meant.

"But you didn't come here to have me discuss the psychology of improvement," the host went on. "What have you been doing since you left college?"

"I've been on a paper in Topeka—the *Tribune*," Sartain responded. "It was my ambition to be a writer, and I supposed then that newspaper-work would be a good way of beginning."

"And you are not so sure of it now?" the novelist asked—"that is, if I may judge from your manner."

"Well," began the young man, "I don't regret the experience, of course—I've had a chance to see all sorts of things, and I've mixed with the people, and I've been forced to study the current of events—but I've come to the conclusion slowly that a daily newspaper is a devouring monster, and that I had better get out of its maw while there is yet time."

The novelist smiled gently, and said, "I should be inclined to think that three or four years on a Kansas daily might lead to the discovery that there is a certain difference between journalism and literature."

"It didn't take me long to find that out," Sartain declared, grimly, "and I've been trying to get away for the last eighteen months—not that I don't like the Topeka people, for I do, and I sympathize with them, and I cannot understand the stupidity of the Eastern papers that are always misrepresenting Kansas. But I suppose the editors have to take their orders from the men who own the newspapers; and I believe most of the New York papers are owned in Wall Street."

"And yet you are now going on one of these New York papers, I suppose?" Vivian queried, quietly.

"I've been able to get out of journalism," Sartain explained. "Carington & Company, the publishers, here in New York, are getting out a big subscription-book; it's to deal with popular superstitions of all sorts, and with the births and deaths of great men, and with the dates of great events—it is to be called the *American Book of Days,* and I am to edit it for them. I begin there the day after to-morrow. I shall make enough to live on, and the labor won't be so exhausting as not to leave me with time for my own work. Now in Topeka I had to grind out so much stuff that even when I had the chance, it was very hard for me to buckle down to anything of my own."

"What did you do on the paper there?" Vivian asked.

"I did everything, first and last," Sartain answered, "except set type and canvass for ads. I've written the whole editorial page for a month at a time. I've done the theatrical notices, and I've attended conventions of all sorts. I always did the book reviews, of course. At first I used to read the books carefully and make up my mind slowly—I don't think I am ever very quick in making up my mind. Then I would write two or three columns sometimes about the volumes that seemed to me best worth while, especially about your books, and about the books that deal with the problems of human progress. But I had to give all that up after three or four months; the pressure was too much for me. I hadn't time to read anything, or to think about what I read, or about anything else; all I had time to do was to write. Now, as I look back on

it, I do not see how I was ever able to get my novel started. I know there wasn't a page of it written before two in the morning, when I was always dead tired —and I've fallen asleep more than once before I had written a stick."

"So you have written a novel?" cried Vivian. "What is it about? Is it a study of life in Kansas? That would be very interesting, and you would have the field all to yourself, as yet, I think."

Sartain was suddenly conscious of the temerity of his choice of subject and of the inadequacy of his equipment.

"No," he admitted at last, "it isn't a Kansas story. In fact, I had planned it before I went West. It is —well — it is an attempt to follow in your footsteps, Mr. Vivian. It is a study of life in New York." And as he made this explanation he acknowledged to himself his presumption in venturing upon so great a theme with so little knowledge. In his sensitiveness he thought he detected a smile hovering upon the face of his host.

"You have chosen a most fascinating subject," said Vivian, simply. "Some day — when we know each other better — you must ask me what the old pope, Pius IX., used to say to visitors to Rome when they were presented to him."

"I suppose it must seem absurd to you," Sartain began to explain hesitatingly, "but I think you ought to be lenient with me—you, at least—since what tempted me was the greatness of the opportunity New York affords to the novelist, as you have proved in your own stories—in *A Sorry Inheritance*, especially."

"Don't suppose that I am insensible to the flattery,"

Vivian responded, with a light laugh; "but you see I *have* to write about New York, since New York is all I know. I haven't the advantage of knowing Kansas; now don't think that is irony! It isn't, I assure you. I sincerely wish I had your knowledge not only of Topeka and its people, but also of Narragansett Pier, seen from the point of view of a Native. Really I am inclined to envy your possession of material so valuable and so fresh."

The manner of the elder man was kindly, and the younger took heart.

"It was my observation of Society people at the Pier which suggested to me the writing of *Dust and Ashes*," he declared.

"*Dust and Ashes* is a striking title," Vivian commented; "but it seems to suggest that your view of Society in New York is a little jaundiced, doesn't it?"

Sartain looked up and faced him sturdily.

"It is the view of a man who has driven a hack at Narragansett Pier," he answered, "and who has lived for years in Kansas."

"I see," said the elder novelist, "and I can sympathize with you, I think. But I think also that the view which seemed to you natural enough, first in Rhode Island and then in Kansas, will change only too swiftly now that you are here in New York itself."

"I arrived only this morning," the young man confessed, "and I have discovered that already. Some of my views have dissolved now. But I shall get others in place of these soon enough. I've been staring all the way up Fifth Avenue—staring like a hayseed."

"And how does the city impress you now?" asked the New Yorker.

"I don't know yet—at least, I haven't been able to formulate what I feel," was the answer. "I am conscious, I think, of a semi-hostility—the city seems so ugly, so noisy, so mighty, so overwhelming! It strikes me that a man must be very big not to be lost here in the immensity of it."

"I don't suppose it is easy to be somebody in a place where a man doesn't always know his next-door neighbor's name, and where he isn't always aware how many children the people have who live across the way," said the novelist. "But a great city minds its own business, which is more than a little village ever does; and a man can be alone, if he chooses; and he can live his own life here. I won't say New York is ever really friendly to the new-comer—it is too self-satisfied for that, and too much absorbed in its own affairs; but, on the other hand, I don't think it is ever hostile, as you have fancied. Indifferent, rather—indifferent is as strong an adjective as I should use."

"I suppose you have the same love for New York that Dickens had for London and that Daudet has for Paris?" Sartain suggested.

"I must not let you compare me with the masters," Vivian smilingly deprecated; "but I suppose my feeling is like theirs in kind, at least. And even if I had no lively affection for the city, I could not help finding it unfailingly stimulating. And so will you."

"I do now," returned Sartain.

"And I will say more," Vivian went on. "I contend that a great city is the best university—that no matter what college you took your degree at, New York is in itself a post-graduate course."

"Doesn't the city sometimes charge a very heavy fee for its diploma?" asked Sartain, slyly.

"Not only that," admitted Vivian, "but the examination is very severe, and very few of those who matriculate are able to keep up with the class. Let us hope you will graduate *summa cum laude*. And if you think an older student can give you any advice worth having, don't hesitate to ask for it."

Sartain at once wondered whether it would be fair to request Vivian to read the manuscript of *Dust and Ashes*. He was in two minds about his own book; one day he would think that as soon as it was published it would be greeted at once as the Great American novel, and on the morrow he would fear that the labor spent on it had been wasted.

"I should like your advice," he began, conquering his timidity with an effort.

"I will give you my Five Good Rules for the Young Man of Letters," Vivian returned, smiling, "the result of many years of experience and meditation. First, don't try to live by literature, but have some other means of support—like your salary from Carington & Company, for example. Second, don't neglect your health; that is to say, exercise regularly, and steadfastly refuse to overwork. Third, do your best always, and never be satisfied with your second best. Fourth, try to please yourself, for then you are sure to please somebody at least; but don't be too easy to please. Fifth, and perhaps this is the most important of all—certainly it is the most practical—fifth, sell your wares always in the best market and for the highest price you can get. Don't think of the pay till the work is done; but when it is done, insist on its full value.

Follow those five rules, and if there is anything in you, it will have a fair chance to come out and to reap its full reward."

"I shall treasure them in my heart," responded Sartain, smiling in his turn, and adjusting his rhetoric to Vivian's. "They are written in my memory in letters of gold."

"And now I have given you my advice," said Vivian, rising and casting his cigar into the fireplace, "let's go into the parlor and my daughter will give you a cup of tea."

"I shall be delighted," Sartain declared, as he stood up. He was seized with a sudden fit of shyness to which he was determined not to yield. He wondered what manner of woman this daughter of the novelist might be, and he was conscious, also, of a hope that the girl who had come up in the elevator with him, Miss Dircks, might still be with Miss Vivian, and that he might make her acquaintance also.

"You know, I have three children," the novelist remarked; "half of them are girls." Then, having enjoyed the younger man's stare of surprise, he added, "and so are the other half! I have three daughters only."

Sartain recalled having read somewhere in a newspaper that Mr. Vivian was a widower, and that his eldest daughter kept house for him. The swift change of the subject of their conversation had taken him by surprise, and he did not see now how he could lead the talk again to his *Dust and Ashes* and ask Mr. Vivian to read it. For the present he felt that the best he could do was to give up the attempt. So he followed his host in silence.

CHAPTER III

As they passed along the dim corridor the novelist continued talking. "Johnny keeps house for me," he said, "and she will give you a cup of tea. But I want you to see my twins also."

Sartain felt that he was expected to say something, and so he answered, "Your twins? Why, I didn't know you had any young children."

The novelist laughed a little. "Well," he said, "they are not so young as they look, and they are not so old as they think they are. But you shall see for yourself."

With that he parted the curtains that draped the doorway of the drawing-room and held them back for his guest to precede him.

The picture thus revealed to Sartain was unexpected. The room before him was large and spacious, having three broad windows, the curtains of which were now drawn back so as to admit as much light as possible. A long, low table had been rolled in front of the central window, and a chair had been placed on top of it. Seated on this chair was a slim girl whose ashen gold hair fell free over her shoulders; and standing on the table behind her chair, and as though walking away from her, were two plump girls, very much alike, with rich auburn hair. Four or five yards

away sat a short young man, who held upright on his knee a large sheet of drawing-paper pinned to a portfolio; and on this he was rapidly sketching the group. At his side stood a fourth girl, rather tall, and dressed somewhat mannishly, having a tailor-made suit, with a linen waistcoat and stiff white shirt. So intent were the five persons in the parlor upon the business in hand that they took no notice of Sartain and his host.

Vivian broke the silence by saying: "Well, well, well!" whereupon the girls all started.

"Oh, papa!" cried one of the plump pair on the table; "how you frightened me!"

"If I am to be taken by surprise like that," said the other, "I can easily get thin!"

The erect young woman standing by the chair of the artist laughed heartily.

"You scared me out of a week's growth," she declared, "and as for Theo and Dora, why, I never saw them jump so!"

The girl with the fragile figure and the fine light hair streaming down her back said nothing. Her chair on the top of the table was so placed that she had seen the new-comers before any of the others had caught sight of them; and yet she had not given the alarm or made any outcry. After a single glance at Sartain she had lowered her eyes. Now as she sat still he saw a blush crimson her cheeks and then slowly fade away.

Then it suddenly struck the young man that he was staring at her most rudely, and he turned away to look at the others. To the best of his recollection he had never seen this girl before, and yet there was

something about her which seemed to him strangely familiar.

"Well, young people," said Vivian, "what's going on here—living pictures?"

"That's about it," answered the tall girl, coming forward with her hands in her manly pockets. "The girls were just posing for Madams here."

"Oh, Adams put you up to it, did he?" her father answered, smiling. "Well, I might have guessed as much. But as you are not in the group, Johnny, perhaps you can give my friend here, Mr. Sartain, a cup of tea?"

"I'm afraid the water has all boiled away," she said, going over to a table in the corner; "but I'll ring for some," and she pushed a button in the wainscoting behind the table.

"Don't trouble yourself on my account," Sartain found voice to say. "I don't care for tea—really, I do not!"

"But you wouldn't deprive me of a cup, would you?" interrupted Vivian. "As Johnny keeps house, she refuses to make fresh tea for me if I am not here on time. She is very strict with me. But, of course, she cannot treat a stranger like you with the discourtesy she reserves for her father."

"What will be thought of me," the tall girl responded, "if you misrepresent me like that?"

"Mr. Sartain comes from a far country, Johnny," Mr. Vivian went on, "and I want you to make him at home here. Sartain, this is my daughter, Joan."

She held out her hand and grasped Sartain's firmly, saying that they tried to be at home on Saturday af-

ternoon, and that they would be glad always to give him a cup of tea.

"And here are my twins," continued the novelist, watching Sartain, as the young man glanced about the room in search of the children thus introduced.

"Oh, papa!" cried one of the plump girls, jumping from the table to the chair and again to the floor.

"I don't think that is funny any longer—if it ever was!" declared the other one, following her sister's example.

"These are my twins," said Vivian, enjoying his traditional jest. "Miss Theodora Vivian, Miss Dorothea Vivian—Mr. Sartain."

The young people bowed, Sartain a little stiffly, and the girls shook hands with him heartily.

"That's papa's pet joke," said one of them.

"And it's our pet aversion," the other added. "We have not brought him up properly."

The manner of the twins struck Sartain as somewhat forward, not to say pert; and he marvelled a little at their free and easy attitude towards their father. He feared that he should never like them—certainly not so well as he already liked the elder sister, Johnny, whose greeting had been frankly cordial.

The girl with the hair down her back had been left sitting in the chair, and the artist was still sketching rapidly. Now she made a movement as though to rise.

"Oh, don't move, please!" cried the young man, with his pencil poised in the air. "Let me have another minute of Cinderella, even if the Haughty Sisters are wicked enough to quit."

"So my twins were posing as the Haughty Sisters?"

Vivian asked, laughing. "I think it was very impertinent of Adams to dare to ask you."

"But he didn't," one of them answered.

"We volunteered," the other followed.

"The fact is," broke in Johnny, "Madams begged Esther to sit for Cinderella, and, just to persuade her, Theo and Dora offered to do the Haughty Sisters."

"And I want to complain of them to you, Mr. Vivian," said the young lady sitting on the chair on the table; "they have treated me shamefully. They pulled my hair down and made me look like a fright!"

Her voice was low and sweet and delicately modulated. It awakened a familiar echo in Sartain's ears, and yet he could not remember when or where he had heard it before.

"Don't be a humbug, Esther," said Dorothea; "you know your hair is just lovely that way!"

"You haven't lived to be nearly nineteen," Theo declared, "without finding out that it is very becoming to you to have your hair down."

Sartain had his eyes fixed on the girl, and he saw her cheeks flush again and then slowly pale. He was afraid that it might be embarrassing for her to hear herself discussed thus before him, as he had not been presented to her, and he felt that it was uncomfortable for him also.

"Certainly Cinderella herself never looked more charming," Vivian declared, "and if I was not so pleased with the picture, I should believe it to be my duty to apologize for interrupting the pose. But hasn't the model earned a rest yet?" he asked, turning to the artist.

"In a minute," the sketcher answered. "Do wait till I get those lovely folds of the dress."

"If it is only the drapery that insensate stone is copying," Vivian went on, "why, let him go on, and I will take this opportunity to present Sartain to Miss Dircks."

"Don't move," cried the artist, "or you'll spoil the folds."

Sartain had stepped forward, and the girl had raised her liquid eyes when this outcry checked them both.

"Mr. Sartain and I have met before," said Miss Dircks—"at least, we came up on the elevator together."

Sartain bowed but said nothing. So this was the girl who had entered the apartment when he did, and that was how he came to be dimly familiar with her voice and her figure. Her face he saw now for the first time, and he could hardly take his eyes from it. He did not understand why he should be so confused. He wanted to say something brilliant, he did not care what, something that would show him off to advantage; but he had never found himself duller. He was absolutely at a loss for words. He knew that he must look like a fool. He wondered whether all the others noticed it—whether she had perceived it. To him it seemed that the dreadful silence lasted several minutes.

"There!" the artist declared, rising to his feet. "I've got it—after a fashion," and he held his sketch away from him and tried to look at it dispassionately. "At any rate, it's the best I can do when you girls persist in chattering."

"Then I may step down now?" asked the girl in the chair.

"Yes, that's all, thank you," answered the artist, still intent on his sketch.

"No manners, has he?" commented Theodora.

"Just like him, isn't it?" returned Dorothea, as they went over to look at the drawing.

Miss Dircks had risen to her feet and was now about to descend from her pedestal.

"Allow me to assist you," said Sartain, delighted that he had found his tongue again. He stepped to her side and proffered his hand.

"Thank you," she answered, laying only the tips of her fingers on his wrist and jumping lightly to the chair and thence to the floor.

"Oh, papa!" cried Dorothea, "just see what a hateful picture Madams has made of us! I hope and trust you will never ask him to lunch again!"

"There!" added Theodora, thrusting the huge sheet of paper under her father's nose. "You didn't suppose your red-headed twins ever looked as disagreeable as that, did you? I think you ought to order Madams to leave the house at once!"

Vivian had felt in his pocket for his glasses. Having adjusted them on his nose, he examined the sketch.

"Well," he said, "you haven't flattered the Haughty Sisters, have you?—but you caught the likeness most absurdly. I shall never let you illustrate a story of mine again!"

"Serves you right, Madams," Johnny declared.

"Oh, there are others," the artist blandly returned. "And it is unfair for you to expect me to provide both the art and the ability to appreciate it. That is absolutely opposed to the principle of the division of labor."

"Sartain!" called Vivian to the young man, who was still standing by the side of Miss Dircks and listening to the easy flow of her talk, and wishing that he could say a word now and then that did not sound hopelessly flat the moment it left his mouth. "Sartain," Vivian began, "I want you to know Emerson Adams here, and I want him to know you, too, for he can find his way around this motley town of ours and show you many a thing I don't know anything about."

The two young men bowed a little stiffly—both of them. Sartain thought that Adams had bad manners; and then it came to him in a flash that the artist would be justified in thinking that his manners were also inferior.

"Emerson," continued Vivian, "I hope you will be kind to Sartain here and lend him the benefit of your vast experience of life."

"If all he wants of me is a share of my experience, I can afford to supply him," said the artist, running one hand through his shock of curly hair, which was very thick and very black. "I've got experience to burn."

"What is this I've heard about you in Rome last winter?" the novelist continued. "Did you really refuse to go and see the Sistine Chapel on the ground that 'Michaelangelo was a d—d dago back-number?'"

"That's just the way my innocent remarks are always misrepresented," explained Adams. "I allowed them to take me to the Sistine Chapel, and all I said was that the decoration looked as if it had been done 'before the war'—and that Michaelangelo ought to study the Japanese if he wanted to be up to date."

"You know what I have already told you, Emer-

son ?" Vivian returned, smiling. "I have always declared that your opinions are more interesting than they are valuable."

Sartain listened in silence to this exchange, and he did not know quite what to make of it. He felt himself to be truly a stranger in a strange land, not wholly understanding the dialect of its inhabitants. He saw that Mr. Vivian seemed to enjoy the flavor of Adams's talk. He saw also, or thought he did, that the artist was fully aware of the effect produced by his unexpected sayings. He found himself suspecting that perhaps Adams had made use of some of them before, or, at least, had thought them up in advance. None the less did Sartain envy the ease of Adams's conversation, and of the artist's attitude towards the world generally. He wished that he was as free from self-consciousness as Adams was ; he wished that he could talk as lightly and as flippantly ; he wished that he was not intimidated by the presence of four agreeable girls.

It was before Miss Dircks that he was most desirous of appearing to advantage ; and yet, when he tried to chat with her, his tongue refused to do the bidding of his will. Apparently the two lobes of his brain gave contradictory orders, and he was able only to stutter forth a few incoherent remarks. He was at a loss also to answer the glancing chatter of the twins, in which there was often an ironic flavor of personality. For him, on that memorable afternoon, conversation was easiest with Mr. Vivian's eldest daughter. Johnny's frank directness was not embarrassing to him, unaccustomed as he was to young women who had adopted ways that seemed to him unduly masculine.

It was a relief to him, therefore, when the white-capped maid appeared with a steaming kettle.

"Can't I have another cup, too?" asked Adams, who had followed Sartain over to the tea-table. "But I want lemon in mine. That was a real lemony lemon you gave me in my first cup. Now don't insult my tea by putting sugar in it!"

"This isn't yours," she returned. "This is papa's. Won't you give it to him, please?" And she handed the cup to Sartain.

"Oh, certainly," said the young man.

He took the cup to Mr. Vivian, who was standing in the centre window talking to Miss Dircks.

"Can't I get you a cup of tea also?" he managed to say to her.

"Thank you," she answered, with the smile, which seemed to Sartain to be her chief charm, "but I have had two already, and father doesn't approve of tea-drinking. He thinks tea is almost as bad for us as rum."

Low as her voice was, it was singularly clear and it carried far. This last remark of hers was heard by Adams, still standing by the tea-table in the next window.

"If tea is as bad for us as rum, Miss Johnny," he said, "perhaps you may put a drop or two of your rum in my tea, just to set one evil off against the other."

"I will give it to you if you must have it," the girl said, "but some day we shall have to insist on your swearing off."

"So far," Adams rejoined, "I have been able to resist all appeals to take the pledge. You see, I believe that a man ought to set a good example to himself."

"Don't be absurd," she returned, "but make yourself useful and pass the sandwiches to Mr. Sartain."

The artist took up the plate, on which there were a dozen disks of bread with the pale-green of a lettuce leaf showing at the edges.

He handed it to Sartain, saying, "He can eat grass if he likes—but my name is not Nebuchadnezzar."

"Nebuchadnezzar wasn't the only creature in the Bible who went on all-fours," declared one of the twins, who had now crossed the room to the tea-table corner.

Sartain had stepped back and a little to one side. He did not know quite what to make of these people. He felt a little out of place among them. He had never seen a young man drink rum in tea, and he had never seen a young lady help him to it. He had never eaten lettuce sandwiches before, and he wondered how they were cut out, and how it was that a vague taste of delicate cheese lingered in his mouth. He liked the flavor, and he liked also the tea itself. He liked to listen to the merry chaffing of the others, even though he could not take part in it. He liked especially to look at Miss Dircks, who was still talking with Mr. Vivian.

Sartain watched them; and he saw for the first time, as she stood in the cold north light of the centre window, how ethereal the girl seemed to be. He felt sure that she could not weigh a hundred pounds. Her soft gray dress seemed to emphasize the radiance of her flower-like face, with its broad, low forehead, its deep gray eyes, and with its ashen-gold hair floating about it like a halo. It was not that she was surpassingly beautiful, so Sartain said to himself, for he

could not honestly say that she was; it was rather that she was infinitely charming. As she chatted vivaciously with Mr. Vivian, Sartain was able to catalogue her good points—the Cupid's bow of her mouth, the graceful curves of her shell-like ear, the transparency of her complexion. He watched the color come and go in her cheek, until at last it deepened and she raised her eyes to his, whereupon he discovered once more that he had been staring at her rudely.

Mr. Vivian had followed her glance, and his gaze now fell upon the young man standing alone.

"Sartain," he cried, "set that cup down anywhere and come here and see how beautiful Central Park is in the glory of an October afternoon. It is brown now, and a little bare — but beautiful always," said Vivian. "To me this view is an unfailing delight. It is better than any picture painted by the hand of man, for it is never twice the same, and yet it is always what it was designed to be. I don't know what season of the year I like it best at. The greenery of the spring isn't fairer than the splendid color of the fall. And that little lake down there, far below the street level, is more effective in the picture when it is frozen and covered with darting midgets than it is today with its swan-boats all in use—as they usually are on a Saturday afternoon when it doesn't rain."

"So these are the swan-boats I have read about!" Sartain commented. "And I suppose those are Lohengrins of Lexington Avenue taking out their Elsas of the East Side."

As he said this he was pleased that he had at last been able to put together a sentence with a literary flavor; yet no sooner was it said than its utter vapid-

ity was revealed to him, and again he writhed inwardly that he could not help talking nonsense before her.

"Adams says that the East Side Elsas, as you call them, are likely sooner or later to find out that all their swans are geese," the novelist returned.

The girl with the halo of fine-spun hair was standing between them in the window, listening to one and the other with obvious interest and yet taking no part in their conversation.

At last she said, "When we first came to New York, my father took me out in one of those boats and I thought I was in heaven!"

Mr. Vivian looked at her and his kindly eye filled with admiration. "I should like to have been the knight you were awaiting, my dear—if you looked as much like Elsa then as you do now."

The girl blushed again.

"I must look like a fright," she said, raising her hands to her head, "with my hair down like this. But it isn't my fault, really—it was Dora and Theo who insisted on it. I hope you will scold them for it."

Mr. Vivian smiled, still looking at her with appreciation.

"I will forgive them this time," he declared; "but only on condition that they do it again."

"Oh, Mr. Vivian," she said, "now you are laughing at me!"

Sartain wanted to frame a hope that if she were ever accused as Elsa was, he might be within sound of the trumpets, to be called as her champion. But he could not find fit words for the wish; and then the fear came upon him that this would be quite as absurd as his last speech.

He admired the novelist, but he was ready just then almost to resent the possession by another man of the tact he was devoid of himself. He took note of the studied simplicity of Vivian's attire, the unobtrusive Greek coin in the scarf, the neatness with which the grayish beard and whiskers had been combed, the general air of satisfied success that surrounded the elder man. He was sufficiently acquainted with the novelist's biography to know that Vivian had started with advantages no greater than his own; and he asked himself why he should not in time climb to the heights the elder man had attained.

The westering sun liquified the golden ribs and reticulations of a dome far in the distance, on the eastern edge of the Park, and Sartain stared at this fixedly, while his hopes sprang forward into the future, and he saw himself at the age of the man beside him, in a room as luxuriously appointed as this—he, too, surrounded by admiration, and able, in his turn, to hold out a helping hand to promising novices, and ready to smooth the way for them to follow in his footsteps.

He was roused from his revery by Miss Dircks.

"How short the days are now, aren't they?" she asked. "It is dark long before dinner—and I think that is horrid, don't you? I like to be out in the afternoon and have it light till six o'clock."

This gave Sartain a chance at last.

"Yes," he answered, "I like to have daylight in the daytime; but I confess that I am fond of the hour 'when Twilight lets her curtain down and pins it with a star,' as the mad poet said."

"That's where those rhymesters have the advantage

of us prose men, isn't it?" Vivian broke in. "They can descend to posterity by a single line."

"They have had that advantage in the past, perhaps," Sartain admitted; "but are they going to keep it in the future? Don't you believe the coming man will prefer prose? I think rhyme is likely to be given up, and perhaps rhythm too."

"I should be very sorry to think that there wasn't going to be any more poetry," the girl responded.

"You needn't be alarmed about that," the elder novelist declared, with his light laugh. "The coming man won't go without his song any more willingly than he will go without his supper."

Miss Dircks looked away from the window into the room, in which the early gloom of a winter afternoon was already beginning to gather.

"It is nearly supper-time now, isn't it?" she asked.

The novelist looked at his watch. "It is only a little after five," he answered. "But why should you be in a hurry to go home?—and why go at all? Why not stay and dine with us?"

"Oh, I can't," she responded. "Father is coming for me, and he likes me to read his paper to him in the evening, especially on Saturdays—then there is always more news from Europe. He is still longing for a great battle in Europe that will hurl all the wicked kings from their thrones."

"He can wait for that till after you have had your dinner with us to-night, can't he?" the novelist urged.

"I'd dearly love to stay with Theo and Dora, of course," she answered; "and father always wants me to have a good time. But he'd really miss my reading the paper to him—and so I think I'd better not stay."

"After that I have no right to insist," Mr. Vivian responded. Then he turned to Sartain.

"Why can't you stay and have dinner with us, then?" he asked.

The tone was warm, and yet the young man felt instantly moved to decline the invitation. He would have liked to dine with the Vivians, although he preferred that Miss Dircks should be also of the company. But she was going now, and it seemed to Sartain that perhaps the invitation had been extended to him only because he had been present when she was asked. So he began to make excuses at once.

"It's very kind of you to ask me, of course," he said, with a return of his stammering shyness. "But it is impossible—quite impossible—that is, to-night. You see, I have only just arrived to-day—and there are any number of things I ought to do this evening."

"Perhaps some other night, then," Vivian rejoined; "later in the winter—when you are settled."

"I shall be delighted," Sartain answered.

While they had been standing in the window he had heard frequent laughter from the corner on his left. Now, as they both turned their backs on the view out-of-doors, they saw the four girls listening to the artist, who was describing the difficulty he had had in getting the material he needed to make the illustrations for a story, the scene of which was laid in Rome.

"What did I know about those cardinals?" he was saying; "and I couldn't get anybody to tell me whether they lived in the Vatican or boarded out. So I dodged the difficulty and made them standing out on the stoop of St. Peter's."

"Was the author satisfied with that?" asked the novelist.

"Oh, I don't know," the artist responded. "Probably not. Authors are generally so unreasonable—sometimes they really want an illustrator to read their manuscripts! Now what can be more cramping to the genius of an artist than to be tied down to the prosaic facts in a manuscript?"

"Yes," said one of the twins, "it is always hard for Madams to be tied down to the facts!"

"In conversation, at any rate," added the other, "Madams just invents all the facts he needs."

The artist paid no attention to this interruption.

"I don't know how much the author liked my drawing," he went on, "but the art-editor of the *Arctic Monthly* liked it, and so I raised my price on him. Did I ever tell you," he asked, addressing himself to Vivian, but after a glance that swept Sartain also into the conversation, "my new trick for getting ahead of art-editors? It is a beauty, and I've worked it on two or three of them already."

"Set forth your scheme," said Vivian, who seemed to enjoy inciting him to further self-revelation.

"Like all really great inventions, it's very simple," Adams replied. "Whenever I take in a drawing which I think pretty good, I make out two bills for it, one for my regular price for such work, and one for about a third more than my regular price. The ordinary bill I put in my right pocket, and the extra-ordinary bill I put in my left pocket. Then, if the art-editor doesn't grumble more than his custom, I take the regular bill out of my right pocket. But if I can see he thinks my work is better than usual, and just what he wants

—and especially if he calls in somebody else to admire it—why, then I go down into my left pocket and pull out the bigger bill, and I tell him I was sure he would see what a very swell thing I'd done this time—and before he knows where he is, I've got him to pass the extra price. Oh, I tell you, a man who is selling his goods to art-editors, he has just got to have the wisdom of the serpent!"

"Well, I think that is rather a snaky trick to play on the poor man," commented Johnny, with her hands in her masculine pockets.

"He isn't a poor man," retorted Adams. "At least, it was the publisher's money I got out of him—and whoever heard of a poor publisher?"

"Do you maintain that all publishers are wealthy?" asked Vivian.

"All of them!" Adams returned. "They are all rolling in ill-gotten gains, made out of the sweat of our brows, and I'll prove it to you. Isn't it a publisher who gives the best dinners in New York? And I don't give dinners, do I?"

"I don't believe you even dine out with anybody else," said Vivian with his light laugh. "At least, you refuse to dine with us to-night. And neither will Sartain, here."

"It is very kind of you to ask me," declared Sartain, a little awkwardly, twisting the end of his thin, brown beard. "I'm afraid I have stayed too long already."

"You must come again when you can stay longer," said Johnny, shaking hands with him heartily.

The other three girls had drawn back into the corner, and the twins were aiding Miss Dircks to arrange her fair tresses. Sartain did not know whether

to go over to them to bid them good-bye or merely to bow. He hesitated, and took a step towards the corner, and then took two steps towards the door. Then he looked back again and chanced to catch the eye of the slim girl, who had her hands above her head and her mouth full of hair-pins. This time she bowed in almost as much confusion as he.

CHAPTER IV

When Sartain stepped out of the elevator on the ground-floor of the house in which Mr. Vivian had his apartment, he found himself face to face with a large, heavy man, perhaps sixty years of age, who was waiting to be taken up.

Adams had forgotten his portfolio on the seat of the elevator, and while he was getting this Sartain had a chance to observe that the elderly man with the robust frame had a full white beard and long white hair falling low on the worn collar of his shabby overcoat. But the most striking features of the face were his bushy eyebrows, bristling above a pair of fiery black eyes, and to some extent contradicting the old man's general aspect of benevolence. Perhaps it was this contradiction that interested Sartain; and he found himself wishing that he knew who this old man was, who seemed to him like a character right out of a book or all ready to go into a book.

When Adams caught sight of the man with the huge eyebrows he held out his hand cordially.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Dircks!" he said, and it struck Sartain that there was a hint of deference in the painter's manner not to be detected when he was talking to Mr. Vivian. "Have you come for Miss Esther?"

"She's ready by now, ain't she?" Dircks answered, slowly, after shaking hands with Adams, and then getting into the elevator. "I don't want she should come home before she is ready."

"Oh yes, she's waiting for you, I think," Adams responded. Then the elevator started upward.

"Is that the father of Miss Esther Dircks?" Sartain asked, as he and the artist passed into the street and turned towards Fifth Avenue.

"Yes," Adams replied. "Queer-looking old boy, isn't he? Looks like a cross between a crank and a freak—just the sort of man who would believe in health-food and sanitary underclothes, doesn't he? He might be the proprietor of Perkin's Patent Hygienic Mince-pies, or something of that sort. But any man who picks Raphael Dircks up for a fool can lay himself down for a flat. I believe the old man thinks that he's a socialist or an anarchist, but I guess he isn't enough of one to hurt."

"Now you suggest it," Sartain declared, "perhaps he does look a little like some of Turgenieff's characters. Didn't his daughter say something about his wanting a general war?"

"I guess that's what she has heard him say," the artist returned. "But I don't believe he'd set the North River on fire, even if he could. If he did, he'd find it harder than ever to make a living."

"What is he?" asked Sartain, wondering how it was that the delicate-looking girl he had just left could have a father of an appearance so formidable and of opinions so incendiary.

"He's an engraver on wood," Adams explained, "and one of the best in the business, too. He can

cut a block so as to bring out the dreamy poetic effects in a landscape better than any man in America. He's got a Dutch thoroughness and a Yankee delicacy of touch. But there isn't much in it now. Process is crowding out wood-engraving, and the engravers will have to learn another trade. Of course, the best of them don't feel it so much, but they are all hurt. The old man looked shabby, didn't he? I guess that won't make him any better satisfied with the structure of society. If he can't get work, he'll think he wants to blow us all to blazes with dynamite every day before dinner."

"Is he — is he very intimate with Mr. Vivian?" Sartain emboldened himself to inquire.

"It's his daughter who knows the twins," explained the artist. "They all went to school together. Now the girls are as friendly as ever, although the old man can't find it very easy to keep up with the procession, while the Vivians are just rolling in money."

Sartain's hope leaped forward, and he saw the day when his own books should be as popular as Vivian's, and when he could surround the woman he might love with a like luxury.

He expressed to Adams his satisfaction in discovering that literature had this ample reward.

"Oh," cried the artist, "don't you make any mistake! It isn't Vivian's money that runs that show of theirs!"

"Don't his stories sell?" asked Sartain, in surprise.

"I don't know whether they do or they don't," Adams returned. "But the best love-story he ever told was when he got his wife to marry him! She was the only child of a very wealthy man. Now she's

dead, and Vivian is a cheerful widower, and Johnny and the twins have about ten thousand a year apiece. I've an idea that the girls are very good to their father; they put up for the apartment and everything; and all he has to do with the money he makes himself is to buy his own clothes, and his cigars, and a picture now and then. He bought a little thing of mine at the Artists' last spring. They've got it at their country-place in the Berkshires. I went down for a week to see that it was hung in the right light. They do know how to make a man feel at home there, I tell you — hot and cold whiskey in every room in the house!"

Sartain was at one with him in thinking that the novelist's daughters were very agreeable young ladies.

"Johnny is the salt of the earth," Adams returned; "she's a perfect gentleman! And the bronze-plated twins are good little girls too. I'm in love with both of them; and if bigamy wasn't against the law I'd propose to the pair of them. I don't believe I'd have any difficulty in living up to twenty thousand a year."

"I noticed that they were very friendly with you," commented the other. "But why do they call you Madams?"

"It sounds as if I were two French women, doesn't it?" the artist responded. "Well, you see they knew me too well to be formal and address me as 'Mr. Adams,' and Johnny thought I wasn't serious enough to be called 'Emerson'; you see, Theo and Dora are only eighteen, and Johnny is twenty-two! So they contracted 'Emerson Adams' into 'Madams.'"

They were walking along Fifty-ninth Street by the edge of Central Park, and the end of the day was near.

The leaves had fallen from the most of the reddened maples. The air was warmer than it had been in the morning, but a chill breeze now blew spasmodically. To the north, over the Park, the sky was cold and gray. The lowering clouds threatened a storm.

They skirted the Plaza and then turned southward into Fifth Avenue. As Sartain looked down that famous vista, the struggling sun on the horizon broke through and flooded the tops of the tall buildings with glory. The spires of the Cathedral rose white and glistening in the distance against a dark bank of slate-colored cloud.

"There," cried the artist in delight, "isn't that beautiful?"

"What?" asked Sartain looking about him in surprise.

"This!" answered Adams, making a broad gesture. "The whole thing! This is what makes life worth living here in New York — this mellow atmosphere and this splendid sunlight."

"I can see what you mean, I think," the new-comer admitted; "there is a certain picturesqueness, and—"

"Picturesqueness!" interrupted the artist vehemently, "of course there's picturesqueness — but there's beauty, too, if you have only eyes to see it. I hope you don't take any stock in that rant of Ruskin's about the country being better than the city? That's all rubbish and tommyrot! A great city is the final achievement of 'this so-called nineteenth century of ours'—and it's the perfect flower of the century too! If the Greeks didn't have anything like New York, now—so much the worse for the Greeks, that's all!"

"New York is certainly very impressive," Sartain

returned. "I begin to feel as though I were nearer to the centre of things."

"Look at that!" cried the artist, paying no attention to this remark and waving his hand at the steam which billowed down over the roof of a tall building. "There's another thing the Greeks didn't have—steam! And it is absolutely the most graceful, poetic, fantastic, various, and beautiful thing in the world to-day. Look at that wreath of white cloud as it curls along!—that's worth while, isn't it?"

Sartain thought that this was said for effect; but when he watched the rolling vapor to which the artist drew his attention and saw it shot through with the rays of the setting sun, he could not deny that it was glorious; and for the first time he was seized by a sense of the beauty inherent in modern life.

"Look down there too!" called Adams as they crossed a side street, at the end of which the sun shone through bars of orange and tawny brown and dark red. "We can do very pretty things down at the ends of the streets when we try. But that's mere Nature—and Nature is never as fine as Art. It needs the suggestion of man's presence to make the landscape really sympathetic. That's why the puff of steam from the hidden locomotive seen from afar in the mountains is so effective; it gives the friendly touch; it strikes the human note. That's the sort of thing I try to put in my pictures—just to make them sing!"

Sartain listened in surprise. He had no longer any doubt as to the artist's sincerity, even if he thought he detected a certain exaggeration of manner.

"Yes," he said, slowly, "now you show me, I can

see that these white plumes waving over the heads of the tall buildings are brave and beautiful. But don't you think the Greeks would have been the first to admit that if they could have seen it?"

"It's very hard to be fair to the Greeks," the artist returned; "they painted their statues, you know; and they wore straw bonnets tied under their chins, like hired men on a farm. But I suppose they were keen enough to know a good thing when they saw it; and maybe they would have had the taste to appreciate steam if they had had the good-luck to have it. But then they didn't have it, did they? And we do; that's where we are so much better off than they were —to say nothing of the fact we are alive now, and they are quite dead, all of them."

As they walked briskly down the avenue in the settling twilight the electric lights suddenly blazed up, and their path, as it stretched away before them, was picked out in dots of diamond.

"There's another thing the Greeks hadn't — the electric light," Adams broke out again. "Indeed, their greatest deficiency was in artificial illumination. You know the wretched little lamps they had in Pompeii?—feeble things a man couldn't see a joke by. The fact is, the Greeks just had to be good boys and go to bed with the little birdies and get up with the early worms; there wasn't anything else for them to do."

Sartain admitted that in many ways life was more agreeably organized now than it could have been in the days of Demosthenes. But still, had not the Greeks a perfect sense of form, and is not form the very core of art? He thought Goethe had said something of the sort.

"Goethe was a Dutchman, wasn't he?" asked Adams, impatiently, "and what does any Dutchman know about art anyway? But I don't want you to think I'm going back on the Greeks, for I wouldn't do it. Praxiteles was no slouch; I know that well enough. Still, I'm tired of hearing them cracked up by people who would be the very first to jump on them if they were alive to-day! And we are not fair to ourselves either, for we judge the Greeks by their best and we judge the men of our own time by their worst — or at least by their average. Now I think there is more good work being done to-day than there ever was at any one time in the past."

"In Europe, perhaps," Sartain allowed; "but not here in America, where life is grimy and sordid and material."

"Life is always grimy and sordid and material, if you stick your nose into the dirt," Adams retorted. "When the Greeks had a symposium, somebody had to wash up the dishes and throw out the slops. I'm sick of having people talk as if the Greeks lived on nectar and ambrosia. That was food for the gods— and the Greeks themselves were very human."

"Yes," Sartain confessed, "I suppose we are always prone to idealize the past."

"And that's a pity, isn't it, since we've got to live in the present?" Adams asked. "To a live man, it's his own times that are most interesting. If a man has eyes to see, he can find lots of things going on to-day right in New York."

"Artistic things?" Sartain queried, a little doubtfully.

"That's what I mean," Adams returned. "There's

a big boom coming in art here in America very soon. We are really a most artistic people; we don't know much about it yet, but we've got the temperament."

"Do you really think so?" Sartain asked, overpowered by the artist's vehemence and yet vibrating to his enthusiasm.

"I'm sure of it," answered Adams. "Why, so long as I couldn't live in Athens under Pericles, or in Florence under the Medici, I'd rather live here in New York now! The pot is a-boiling to-day, and I only hope I'll live long enough to see what kind of a dish it's going to be."

Sartain was not accustomed to listen to conversation as pyrotechnic as this. He wanted time to turn these startling suggestions over in his mind.

"Speaking of pots and pans," Adams continued, "here in New York you can get a civilized dinner. I've got an engagement to-night, or I'd blow you off to one. Tell me where you put up, and I'll come around for you some evening."

Sartain gave him his address in Irving Place, and asked the artist if he would drop in some night at six, and share his boarding-house fare.

"First time I'm over the limit at the club I'll descend on you," Adams declared; "and you'll be sorry you asked me. Hello! here's Thirty-fourth Street, and I must tear myself away from you. Your conversation is so fascinating I hate to do it; but I have to, if I'm going to be dressed for dinner. Good-bye!"

And without shaking hands, or any more formal leave-taking, Adams turned into the side-street, leaving Sartain to continue his walk down the avenue

alone. He lingered and loitered on the way, and, as a result, he was a few minutes late for his dinner.

When he went down to the basement he heard a confused babble of voices welling forth from the dining-room; but this chatter sank as he appeared in the doorway. Every seat was occupied save one between the bicycle young man and the yellow-haired elocutionist; and everybody promptly stared at the new-comer, to Sartain's intense discomfort. His shyness was intermittent, and sometimes he could resist the attack by a resolute effort; but in the presence of all these men and women, well acquainted with one another, he felt himself a stranger; and his diffidence was now intensified by the sense of loneliness. He slipped into his chair as swiftly as he could. He was glad when Kettleton greeted him cordially, and when Mr. Wornum and Miss De Lancey bowed to him elaborately.

In the course of the dinner Kettleton took occasion to introduce the new-comer formally to the various ladies and gentlemen who were within reach. The gentlemen asserted that they were glad to make Mr. Sartain's acquaintance, and the ladies declared that they were pleased to meet him.

The young man who had been brought up in Rhode Island and who had been living in Kansas had thought himself to be wholly free from snobbishness, and quite incapable of holding one person better than another because of riches or education or social advantages of any sort. Yet now he caught himself contrasting the men and women around him, as they ate their hasty dinner in the crowded and semi-subterranean basement, with the group who had gathered only an hour or two earlier about the tea-table in Mr. Vivian's spa-

cious drawing-room with its broad outlook over Central Park. He had come East ready to resent wealth and prompt to protest against all social inequalities. He had the spirit of the reformer burning ardently within him — and was this flame to be blown out by the opening of a door into a single household of wealth?

With thoughts like these to fill his mind, he had even less desire than usual to take part in the conversation. He answered when one or another spoke to him; but otherwise he said little, and he hardly even listened to the talk that went on all around him. Not loquacious often, he was now even more taciturn than usual. When dinner was at an end he rose among the first, anxious to be alone in his own room.

As he went out of the door the pocket of his coat chanced to catch on the knob. Thus it was that, although out of sight of those still in the dining-room, he was not out of hearing.

"I say, Kettleton," he heard a voice declare, "that new friend of yours is a regular clam."

"He don't need to hire a hall, he don't," said another voice.

"Ah, go easy!" the bicycle young man retorted. "He's all right! Just wait till he gets his wind. He's just come in from the West, and he ain't used to Society yet—see?"

Once in his little hall bedroom, Sartain felt as though he were once more his own master. He locked the door and lighted the gas. Then he went to his trunk and again took out the manuscript of his novel.

He was at the end only of his first day in the metropolis, and already his ideas about the city had been modified in more ways than one. He foresaw that he

would have to rewrite several passages of *Dust and Ashes;* and there was no page in it which had not been written two or three times already.

Having the interlineated leaves in his hand, he read again one of his favorite chapters, lingering over it lovingly. It was the scene in which the hero, a telegraph-operator, who was also an advanced thinker, threw up his situation in the headquarters of the political party with which he had hitherto been in sympathy, because he was sick of the corruption, the intimidation, and the fraud he was called upon to take part in as the transmitter of confidential orders. Although the hero was heavily in debt, for money lent secretly, to the worthless father of the woman he loved, he did not shrink when put to the test; he resigned his salary unhesitatingly; and he took occasion to tell the veteran politician who had employed him what was an honest man's opinion of the dastardly practices he had witnessed. The interview between the old party-leader and the young telegraph-operator took place at midnight, while the echoes of a most spectacular torch-light procession still rang in the air. As Sartain silently repeated the scorching words of his hero, he could not withhold his own approval, and he even wished that he could have been present actually to see the old villain cower before the scorn of the honest young fellow.

When he had read the chapter to the end he laid down the manuscript to light a cigar. Then he visualized the picture presented when he followed Mr. Vivian into the parlor. He recalled Cinderella and the Haughty Sisters as they posed on the long, low table. He felt greatly disgusted that he had not been

able to converse with the girls as easily as with their father. His cheek burned when he thought how he had neglected every opportunity to compliment Cinderella. How dull she must have deemed him! That he should have seemed stupid to Johnny and the twins was humiliating enough; but that he should have been a boor before Miss Dircks was unpardonable. He evoked her image, her slim figure, her grace of attitude, her thoughtful expression, her broad brow, her deep eyes, and her sensitive mouth. She floated before him in a vision scarcely human—almost angelic. Then he went back to the few words they had interchanged; he made up the pretty speeches he ought to have said to her that afternoon; he speculated as to the way she would have received them, and as to the responses she might have made.

When he had smoked his cigar he returned to his manuscript. As he read he began to fear that his heroine was altogether too shadowy and almost unreal. The woman of flesh and blood was far more fascinating than the woman of his own inventing. As soon as he perceived this, he asked himself why it should be so. He catalogued the charms he had bestowed upon his heroine, and he tried to tabulate the reasons why he was so much attracted by Miss Dircks.

It pleased him to let his thoughts play about the fragile-looking girl he had met that afternoon for the first time. Though he strove to fix his mind upon his manuscript, it was rebellious and refused to attach itself, insisting on its right to roam off in pursuit of her. He wondered what she was doing at that hour of the night, and where she was, and what she was thinking about. He wished that he knew her father, and could

thus guess at her home-life. He wanted to know all about her—not only about her father and her friends, but about herself. He wanted to be with her. In a word, he wanted her.

Then, in an illuminating flash of passionate desire, it broke upon him—he was in love! He did not think of denying it, for he saw at once that it was indisputable; and he was glad. He rejoiced at it even. It pleased him that he should have fallen in love at first sight, even as Romeo did.

CHAPTER V

In the next few days Sartain began to feel his footing in New York firm beneath him. On Sunday afternoon he took a long walk in Central Park. From one of the knolls at the southern end he peered up at the windows of the apartment-house where the Vivians lived. He wished that Esther Dircks might be calling again on the twins, and that she would look out of the window and recognize him and smile down graciously. The distance was too far for him to make sure of her smile, so he substituted for this an encouraging wave of her hands. Then he thought how fortunate it would be for him, if, while she was gazing down at him there, a little child should fall overboard from one of the boats on the lake below, so that he could plunge in and rescue it and restore it to its mother, looking up at the girl in the window so that she might know that he had performed this deed in her honor. Perhaps it would be better if Esther herself were out driving with Johnny, and if the horses should take fright, and rear and plunge, and finally bolt past the bench whereon he was sitting with a book, which he would cast aside just in time to clutch the frantic steeds by the bridle, saving the lives of the two girls at the risk of his own. After these flattering visions had dramatized themselves, Sartain almost laughed to think that he had

fancied for his own use devices so stale and so hopelessly outworn as these—devices he would never have dared to put into a novel.

Then as he turned away from Fifty-ninth Street and resumed his walk, it occurred to him all at once that perhaps he was too late, for Esther Dircks might be in love with somebody else. He had no right really to assume that he was the first man to be struck by her exceeding charm. Perhaps she might be engaged already; and as this dread doubt came into his mind Sartain stopped short and stared ahead stupidly.

Three giggling girls passed him, and one of them said, "Maybe he's in love!" and one of the others returned, "Maybe he's eaten something!" He heard this without taking in the meaning; and then all three girls laughed again; and it was only a minute later he perceived that it was at him they were laughing.

He started to walk back to Irving Place. When he turned into Fifth Avenue he found himself greatly interested in the difference presented between the appearance by that distinguished thoroughfare on Sunday and on Saturday afternoon. He thought it was gayer; there were more people. The men and women were walking leisurely; for the first time since his arrival Sartain saw New Yorkers who were not in a hurry. They seemed to him also to be very well dressed—the men as well as the women.

Perhaps it was his discovery of the fact that he was in love, and perhaps it was the stylishness of the men he met that afternoon on the avenue, that opened his eyes to the slovenliness of his own clothes. He compared himself with the other young fellows that

afternoon, much to his own disadvantage. His trousers, he discovered, were not only without the carefully preserved crease down the front which fashion prescribed, but they were also baggy at the knees. His slouch hat, very comfortable to the head as it was, was altogether out of season. He resolved at once to get a new suit the first thing Monday morning, and a new hat also. Fortunately he had money saved up and he could indulge his whim. He determined to ask Kettleton where he ought to go to get his things.

When he consulted the bicycle young man that evening after tea, while they were smoking their cigars on the stoop of the boarding-house in the warm October evening, Mr. Kettleton was prompt with advice.

"You want to go to Benton's," he said—"Benton Brothers & Company, in Broadway, near Union Square here; that's where you want to go. They give you the best value for your money—see? They don't sell hand-me-downs, fit-you-like-the-paper-on-the-wall, Benton's don't; no, sir. Their suits are just as toney as if they was custom-made on the avenue; you see if they ain't. Why, I've met club-men coming out of there—men whose names you'll read in the Four Hundred every week. Say, I'll take you in and introduce you; the head of the neckwear department is a great friend of mine—we went to school together in the old Sixth Ward. But I can't get a discount for you. I can't get it for myself. It's a square game at Benton's—cash down and everybody treated all alike. So you don't have to pay more than the Prince of Wales would, if he was to come over in a hurry and go in there for a new swallow-tail—see?"

And Mr. Kettleton was as good as his word. On

Monday morning, before going to his work, he escorted Sartain into the large establishment of Benton Brothers & Company, and he aided the new-comer in making a proper selection. As the suit chosen fitted without alteration, Sartain kept it on and paid for it.

As they were leaving the clothing-store together, Kettleton looked into a tall mirror and bade Sartain do the same.

"It's a daisy fit, that suit is," he said, "but then you've got a figure for clothes. I wish I had, but I'm too thin."

Sartain was not accustomed to consider his personal appearance; and it may have been this casual remark of Kettleton's which caused him to have an acute consciousness of his new clothes. For the first time in his life, to the best of his recollection, he felt himself to be well dressed. It was almost with a strut of self-satisfaction that he walked from Union Square to the tall building in which Carington & Company had their offices. He was so keenly aware of the new suit that he found himself examining the faces of the people he passed to see if they were also noticing it. In the elevator going up he stood, rather than trust the immaculate cloth upon a leather seat which did not seem to be as clean as it might be.

But all thought of his apparel vanished from his mind when he came to the glass door on which was painted the name of "Carington & Company, Publishers. Eli Low, Manager." It was not without trepidation that he entered the offices where he had been engaged to work for the next few months.

But he was soon set at ease by the business-like man-

ner of Mr. Low, who bade him welcome briefly, and who then proceeded succinctly to declare the exact nature of the task Sartain was expected to accomplish. He was to have his own little room; and there was a type-writer whose services he could command when need be. For the rest, Mr. Low himself would be there every day; and if Mr. Sartain needed any further advice, he was to apply for it when it was wanted.

Before the end of his first week Sartain began to doubt whether he should ever understand New York. He resented its self-satisfied attitude, its air of calm superiority, apparently unaware of the existence of any other city in the United States, its absolute freedom from any jealousy of its would-be rivals, its cold conceit in deeming itself so exalted that competition was out of the question. In spite of the semi-hostility of his attitude when he came to town, he had felt at once the reserve power of the place, its irresistible force, its superb vitality. New York was too big, too noisy, too ugly, too blatant; but, for all that, he yielded himself to its domination inevitably.

And he set himself to study the city as though it were a problem. If its secret could be rung from it by a resolute determination to attain all possible knowledge, then Sartain made sure that in good time he would possess himself of it. He found there was but little daylight left when five o'clock came and his office-hours were over, but he took advantage of what time there was, and of his sixty minutes' nooning. He went for long walks in the evening; and once he got up at daybreak to see the markets. His unfriendliness faded away rapidly, and before the end of his first

week he was ready to acknowledge that New York had conquered him.

That it was a city of startling contrasts was the first result of his investigation ; and he had known that before. Nowhere else in the world were the extremes of wealth and poverty more conspicuous. Up-town, near Central Park, there were half a dozen houses the owners of which had each a royal income—indeed, a revenue the half of which more than one actual king in Europe would be very glad to possess ; and down-town, east of the Bowery, was a district more densely inhabited than any part of the most congested town in Europe. Moral contrasts were as obvious as physical, and they arrested Sartain's attention even more swiftly. Instances of ethical destitution and squalor he could collect at will, and also examples of lofty austerity. He was told one day of a religious corporation that owned some of the most neglected tenement-houses in the city, and that even went to law to resist an order to make these wretched dwellings habitable ; and the next night he heard, casually, that one of the most noted of the very wealthy men of New York held himself to be but a steward of his own riches, not only distributing his means with cautious liberality, but also giving his personal service on obscure committees of minor charitable societies.

Again and again, during his first week in New York, Sartain had asked himself how he could soonest see the girl he loved. He did not know where she lived. It was at the Vivians' he had met her, and it was there only that he could hope to meet her once more. Mr. Vivian had kindly bidden him to come in for a cup of tea any Saturday afternoon ; but Sartain was afraid it

might seem like forwardness if he were to take advantage of this invitation for the very first day that it was open.

Even after he had had his luncheon and knew that he had the rest of the afternoon all to himself, he was still undecided, wavering between his intense desire to see her and his unwillingness to appear pushing. His love was strong, but it was also new, while his shyness was of long standing, and its roots were deep down in him. To listen to the chatter of the twins and to shake hands heartily with Johnny would be a fearful pleasure for him; he would enjoy it, no doubt, but he shrank from it timorously. If he could only make sure that he should find Esther Dircks at the Vivians', he would take his courage in both hands and go, even at the risk of seeming obtrusive; but there was no certainty that she would be calling at the very hour he called.

In this condition of hesitancy Sartain brushed his hair very carefully and combed his thin brown beard. For the first time in his life his personal appearance began to interest Sartain seriously; and he had taken to reading the newspaper articles on men's fashions. His habit of introspection and of self-analysis kept him promptly aware of this new development of his; and he smiled at himself as he glanced in the glass of the hat-rack in the lower hall of the boarding-house.

When he came out in the street the sun shone down from a cloudless sky, and the day was resplendent with the golden beauty of October. The tall plumes of steam waved from the high roofs of the big buildings. Adams's eulogy of this city had opened his eyes to things not seen before. His realism had been rather

sordid, and he had looked down for his facts rather than up. Now, as he walked up-town, he began to perceive that a basis of truth underlay Adams's extravagance. Sartain was ready to recognize that New York had at times and in places a violent unkempt picturesqueness, not without a charm of its own. Few of the buildings were really beautiful; there was so much high color as to produce a general effect of spottiness; there was no repose whatever. Yet the incessant bustle was not unpleasing to him, and the high notes did not jar on the eye of a young man fresh from the West. As a whole, the city was intensely modern, and it was ever vibrating with vitality. The roar that rose from it no longer smote upon Sartain's ears as the shriek of a wild beast; it rang there now rather as a pæan of progress; it was a chant of triumphant work.

When he came to the book-stores between Fourteenth Street and Twenty-third he lingered to look in their windows, and to pick out the fine editions he would have in his library when he was a successful author and had a house of his own. He compared the more or less flamboyant posters which called attention to popular novels; and he devised one for *Dust and Ashes* which should be as startling as any of these and more alluring.

As Sartain went on up Fifth Avenue, he felt again that no novelist could have a more enticing theme or a grander than to reproduce in one mighty story all the immense movement of human life in the metropolis of the New World, where men and women from every country in the Old World were mingled together, and where the American spirit was most obvious in spite of the

presence of more foreigners than in any other city of the Union. In *Dust and Ashes* Sartain had tried to show only one cross-section of city life; he had confined his attention almost entirely to the villains of Wall Street and to their victims; and he recognized now more than ever that Wall Street was not all of New York. In the week since his arrival from Topeka he had seen vista after vista opening before his vision; and it seemed to him that there was no end to the points of view from which the complexities of metropolitan life could be surveyed.

Then it was that Sartain resolved to write the prose epic of the great city; to try to do for New York what Zola had done for France; to show every important aspect of the metropolis one after another; and to relate these one to the other, so that while the separate parts should be each complete in itself, the whole should also have a unity of its own due to the harmonious adjustment of its division and to its own massive structure. He began at once to plan how he could incorporate *Dust and Ashes* in this larger scheme, recalling with pleasure the fact that Balzac had not thought of the *Human Comedy* until after he had written a dozen or more of the novels he afterwards wrought into his grand framework.

Thus engaged, he came to Central Park; and a few minutes later he rang the bell of Vivian's apartment.

The neat maid with the white cap opened the door.

"Is Mr. Vivian in this afternoon?" Sartain asked, confidently.

"No, sir," was the unexpected response.

"He's not in?" Sartain said, in surprise.

"No, sir," the maid answered. Observing the de-

spondency of the visitor's face, she added: "But the young ladies are at home."

Then Sartain's courage failed him.

"I—I wanted to see Mr. Vivian very particularly," he hesitated. "But I—I haven't time this afternoon to call on the young ladies. I—I will come again." And with that exhibition of sudden shyness he turned away and rang for the elevator.

Five minutes later he regretted what he had done with poignant self-reproach, for he passed Miss Esther Dircks and her father, to whom she was listening devotedly.

When he saw them Sartain stopped short, but so intent was she on what her father was saying that she did not see the young man. Old Dircks flashed a look of inquiry from under his bushy eyebrows, but Esther did not remark this. They had passed him before he had recovered his self-possession. Then it was too late. He could not run after the girl in the street. He could not do anything, it seemed to him just then, except make a fool of himself. He wanted to gladden his eyes by another look at her. He turned and saw the old man and the young woman go up the steps of the Vivians' apartment-house. Then he walked back to Irving Place slowly, abusing himself all the way down.

That evening, just as he was finishing his dinner, a letter bearing a special-delivery stamp was brought to him. He did not recognize the handwriting, and he could not guess who it was that should be thus in haste to have a communication reach him.

He tore it open and found that it was from Mr. Vivian, regretting that he had been out that afternoon,

and so deprived of the pleasure of a chat, and asking Sartain if he would care to go to the next meeting of the Contemporary Club on Wednesday evening of the following week. If Sartain would answer at once in the affirmative, Vivian would see that an invitation was sent on Monday.

Sartain rushed up-stairs, got out a postal-card, and wrote to Mr. Vivian, accepting with great pleasure and expressing his thanks. He went out and posted this at the corner. As he came back to the boarding-house he remembered that the next day was Sunday, and that he could have taken time to write a more formal reply, since, in any event, Mr. Vivian would not receive it before Monday morning.

CHAPTER VI

SARTAIN carefully studied the card of invitation of the Contemporary Club, and he found in one corner:

Evening Dress. Ladies will please not wear bonnets.

He took out his dress-suit, which he had not put on half a dozen times since the last concert of the college glee club, but it seemed to him in good condition still. He debated long whether he should wear a white tie or a black one. Finally, when Wednesday came and he dressed before dinner, he decided in favor of white.

He went down to the basement of the boarding-house, conscious that he looked better in the dress-suit than in his cutaway, and pleased with this consciousness. The tying of his white cravat had taken time, and he was a little late for dinner.

"Got 'em all on, haven't you?" Kettleton asked, with friendly interest. "What is it you're going to take in to-night—the Patriarchs? It's too soon for the French ball or the Arion."

Sartain said that he was going to the meeting of the Contemporary Club; and then, as Kettleton had never heard of this organization, he had to explain what it was. Miss De Lancey came to his assistance, informing the other boarders that she herself had once been asked to read a paper before that club, on "Elocu-

tion, a Necessity of Modern Civilization," but that she had had an attack of bronchitis, which prevented her from delivering her address.

Most of the conversation during the dinner was devoted to clubs and to Society and to fashionable fads. It struck Sartain that his going to the Contemporary Club in a dress-suit had raised him in the estimation of his fellow-boarders. Again it amused him to liken himself to Rastignac setting forth from the humble Maison Vauquier to the most aristocratic entertainments in Paris.

When Sartain entered the building where the club was to meet it was just eight o'clock, and carriage was following carriage to the door. He gave up his ticket, and was directed to a dressing-room in which two or three attendants were waiting to take his hat and overcoat. Then he looked himself over in the glass in the dressing-room, and curled the ends of his mustache, smiling tolerantly at his own fatuity, since he could see other men all around him wearing dress-suits with complete unconcern. He tightened his white tie and went into the corridor.

There he heard the monotonous voice of the man who was calling out the names of the guests that pressed forward two by two. Sartain took his place in the column, and after the crier had announced "Mr. and Mrs. 'Enry 'Arris," he found himself in the doorway of the reception-room. He gave his name, and heard it bawled forth, "Mr. Frank Sartain!" Then he saw he was in the presence of five ladies in evening dress, standing in a row, and all bowing to the new-comers.

Sartain bowed also, and walked on, not knowing

what he was expected to do next. He looked about, hoping to descry Mr. Vivian, and longing to catch a glimpse of Esther Dircks, if by good-fortune she were present. But he saw nobody that he knew in the reception-room, and he discovered that the guests were passing through to the adjoining ballroom. This was spacious, and filled with camp-chairs; there was a small platform at one side, with a table, half a dozen arm-chairs, and three or four tall palms in pots. While he was trying to select an inconspicuous seat, he heard the crier behind him call out, "Mr. Dircks! Miss Dircks!"

Sartain turned back at once and resolved to intercept them. He beheld Dircks stare with surprise at the ladies receiving, and then acknowledge their bows with what was little better than a nod. He saw Esther courtesy most gracefully; and he was dimly aware that she was clad in some light blue stuff, which made her more vaporous than ever. He felt that at last he had a chance to push his acquaintance with her, and he stepped forward to meet them. His heart beat fast, but he conquered his timidity by a violent effort of the will. He wondered even if she would recognize him, since they had met but once.

As she drew near him she looked up and caught his eye.

"Oh, Mr. Sartain!" she said, smiling. "I thought we should see you here this evening. Johnny told me her father had sent you a card. He gave us ours, too."

"It was very kind of him," was all that Sartain could find words to say, ill at ease again in the presence of the one woman before whom he wished always to appear at his best.

"IN THE PRESENCE OF THE ONE WOMAN"

The girl did not seem to be conscious of his embarrassment. She turned to her father, who had stood silently a little behind her, gazing intently at the young man from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"Father," she said, "this is Mr. Sartain, whom I met at Mr. Vivian's a week or two ago."

"I've seen you somewhere, I think; haven't I?" asked Mr. Dircks, in a deep, mellow voice, holding out his ungloved hand; "coming out of Mr. Vivian's about a week ago?"

The young man explained that he had passed Mr. Dircks twice, once in Mr. Vivian's apartment-house, and once just outside its door. Then the elder man released his hand, saying, "I knew I'd seen you somewheres or other."

Sartain was greatly interested in Esther's father, partly because he was her father and partly because the man himself was unconventional. The young fellow thought how well the name Raphael Dircks fitted the old man, incongruous as were the suavity of the Christian name and the sharpness of the patronymic. "Raphael" suggesting something child-like, innocent, ignorant of the world, as Esther's father appeared to be; and "Dircks" was tense and piercing, as the old man seemed to be also when he raised his bushy eyebrows and transfixed Sartain with a glance.

It was Esther who broke the silence with a little laugh. "Well, why are we all standing here?" she asked. "I'm afraid all the best seats will be gone, and I want father to have a good one, for he likes to hear every word. Isn't the room filling up, Mr. Sartain?"

"I don't know," the young man answered, as they

entered the ballroom. "I didn't look—that is, I was looking when I heard your names announced, and I—and I—" Here he broke off inconsequently.

"I think we had better try to get on the centre aisle—don't you, father?" the girl continued. "Perhaps we can find three places together, and Mr. Sartain can sit with us."

"I shall be delighted," Sartain answered; "that's exactly what I was hop—"

"Here are two seats," interrupted Dircks.

"Then you and Mr. Sartain can have them," Esther returned, "and I will take this one just behind you."

The young man protested at once. He could not think of separating father and daughter. He begged that he might be allowed to take the single chair behind.

"Oh, very well, then," she returned, "if you insist," and with that she passed in and left the seat on the aisle for her father. "Only I thought that perhaps you two would know so much more about what they are going to discuss here to-night that you might like to talk it over together, and I could listen."

So saying, she arranged herself on the seat, and her father took the chair next. Sartain sat down behind the old man, and, to his delight, he discovered that he could talk to her almost as well as if he were by her side, while he could look at her far more easily.

When they were settled she glanced back at him and said, "You see, Mr. Sartain, I don't know anything at all about politics, and father is awfully interested in them. Sometimes he tries to talk to me about them; but it's not a bit of good—I never can under-

stand them. I'm very glad I haven't a vote, for I should never know what to do with it."

Her voice fell on Sartain's ears like exquisite music, and her face rose above the light blue of her dress like some rare flower, delicate and priceless. He had hitherto been inclined to approve of woman-suffrage; but since she did not want the ballot, he no longer saw the necessity of forcing it upon the sex.

"Perhaps it would not be fair to insist on a woman's going to the polls," he declared. Then his honesty compelled him to add, "But there are many noble women who want the ballot, and it is not easy to refuse them, is it?"

"It would be horrid to make us vote if we didn't want to, wouldn't it?" the girl returned, lightly. "They couldn't do that, could they?"

"I should call it a most high-handed proceeding if they did," Sartain agreed, smiling back at her.

Here Mr. Dircks turned himself around in his seat and said, "I don't see as a woman has any more use for a vote than a pig has for a ring in his nose. A ward-meeting over a bar-room ain't any place for a woman."

Thus appealed to, Sartain agreed again. "I suppose that politics is often a dirty business at best—and perhaps women are better off out of it."

"That's what I think," Dircks declared, and then he sank back into silence. He struck Sartain as a man not prone to conversation, and with difficulty finding words to express himself. Even if Dircks's manner was a little gruff, the brusqueness was apparent only; it was not intentional; and there was true kindliness underneath it. But no weakness was

visible in the old man's countenance. From the father it was that the daughter derived her broad brow and her resolute mouth.

The girl seemed to feel that it was her duty to entertain the young man, and she turned back to him again, and asked, "Have you seen Johnny yet? She said she was coming with her father. You know Dora and Theo never come to the Contemporary; they say it's slow and poky! Now I don't think it is, do you? Even if I don't understand the speeches always, it is lots of fun to watch the people."

"This is the first time I've been to one of the meetings," Sartain responded. "You see, I haven't ever been to New York before to stay."

"Why, of course not!" the girl returned, "you are from the West, aren't you? I should think you would find New York so strange after the prairies and all that!"

Sartain was delighted with the ease of her manner and with the frankness of her speech. She made him feel almost as though he were already an old friend of hers. His shyness was in abeyance as long as he was under the spell of her voice.

"Oh, there's Johnny," she cried, "and Mr. Vivian, too!" and she waved her hand at two figures standing in the arch of the reception-room.

The young man followed her eyes, and saw Mr. Vivian and Mr. Vivian's eldest daughter. With his masculine susceptibility to the effect of dress Sartain was struck by the improvement in Johnny's appearance. There was still a suggestion of the mannish in her handsome evening gown, but the lace at the open throat softened the severity she chose to affect.

"They don't see us," said Esther Dircks, as the Vivians turned up the aisle nearest to the entrance. "Isn't it a pity? I'd love to have Johnny here—and then you and father could talk over the speeches with Mr. Vivian, couldn't you?"

This time Sartain was able to find a form of words to express his perfect satisfaction with his position as it was.

"That's very pretty indeed," the girl responded, with the brilliant smile that lighted her face and transfigured it. "But you can't talk to me much longer, for there come all the lady vice-presidents."

"The lady vice-presidents?" Sartain queried.

"They were receiving," she explained; "the ladies who stood in a line at the door, you know. When almost everybody has come, the gentlemen go and escort them to the first row there—don't you see all the chairs in front are reserved?—so they get the best seats; and I shouldn't wonder if they were glad enough to sit down after standing out there so long and having to bow to all sorts of old frumps."

While Esther Dircks was speaking, Sartain was watching a procession which passed from the reception-room down one of the aisles between the serried chairs in the ballroom. The five ladies who had received advanced each on the arm of a gentleman, who gave her one of the reserved seats on the front row, taking his place beside her. Behind these couples came the two speakers of the evening. They had to pause in the aisle while the ladies selected their seats and adjusted their skirts. Then the president led them to the platform, and they all sat down in the comfortable arm-chairs. Soon the president rose to

his feet and transferred a tray with a pitcher of iced water and three or four glasses from a table at the back to one in the front of the little stage. Having done this he stood behind this front table and surveyed the audience calmly. Sartain envied the composure with which he could stand there doing nothing without embarrassment.

After waiting perhaps a minute, the president gave half a dozen light taps with a gavel that lay ready to his hand on the little table, and immediately all conversation died down. Then, in fluent words, he welcomed the members of the club and their guests to the first meeting of the season. He outlined the programme for the winter, and announced that the subject of the opening debate was "The Problem of Modern Society." As the first speaker, he had great pleasure in introducing the celebrated scientific anarchist, Herr Adolph Kreutzner, who would expound the extremely radical view.

There was applause when the president sat down and a thin little middle-aged man of mild appearance rose and stepped to the edge of the platform. His black hair was cut short and his black beard was closely trimmed. He began with an apology for his English—and his accent and the rhythm of his delivery were most unmistakably German. But his vocabulary was ample and his grammar was adequate, and he spoke clearly and distinctly, even if monotonously. Sartain soon perceived that the German was absolutely devoid of humor, that he took himself and his mission very seriously, and that he was almost passionless.

While listening to the opening remarks of the scientific anarchist, Sartain found that his eyes kept re-

turning to the girl who sat almost in front of him, and who seemed to him far more charming than any other woman in the room. He was glad that he was so placed that he could stare at her without rudeness; and yet once, at least, he feared that the fixity of his gaze might have made her uncomfortable, for a gentle blush rose in her cheek and neck and died away only as she glanced back at him with a little smile. Her ashen hair shone under the glitter of the electric lights like an alloy of silver and gold; there was one wisp of it that would not stay in its place, and that she tried to put back again with an unconscious gesture—girlish and captivating.

In the meantime the lecturer had been pursuing his argument. He had shown that monarchy, aristocracy, parliamentarism, democracy, and socialism were necessary stages in the evolution of human society. Socialism, like democracy now, like parliamentarism in the past, is a step in advance, no doubt, but it is not the final goal. It is only a mitigated communism. It is imperfect and incomplete in that it allows government to exist. If he governs best who governs least, then anarchy is obviously the best form of government. Under anarchy man is free to develop his own individuality absolutely. He is released from all control. He is left to the guidance of his own benevolent instincts unperverted by misleading education. Under anarchy there will be no privileges and no private property and no public property. All men will be equal in all ways, entering freely and gladly into voluntary associations for co-operative works, every man taking orders only from himself, and doing willingly that part of the labor for which

he knows himself to be best fitted. Every man will be encouraged to round out his own character to the perfect sphere. Evil passions will inevitably be eliminated, since they are only the result of want, of envy, and injustice, and must therefore disappear completely with the conditions that caused them. With the abolition of private property there disappears all pretence of any necessity for policemen, for police courts, for judges, and for lawyers. With the abolition of government the idea of nationality vanishes, and the soldiers will be released from destructive work to do their share of production; and so the lawyers will be, and the judges and the policemen and the jailers. With the extinction of these noxious parasites the hours of labor for any one individual need be but few, and only enough to keep him in perfect physical condition. As physiology has shown us that the highest pleasure comes from the exercise of our natural functions, every man will rejoice to do that part of the common task in the doing of which he is the most dexterous; and as he is working also for his own satisfaction, he will produce abundantly for the needs of the public without effort or fatigue or strain to himself.

With a stiff and military bow Herr Kreutzner made an end of speaking. There was generous applause, although Sartain suspected that it lacked warmth. A rattle of conversation started at once all over the hall.

Esther Dircks turned back and asked Sartain what he thought.

"I've been used to supposing that I was pretty radical myself," the young man answered; "I'm a free-trader and a single taxer, and so on, but I can't go as far as he does, can you?"

"Oh, I don't pretend to know anything about it," she responded. "I haven't a masculine mind, you know. But it does seem a shame that something can't be done about the tenements and the men out of work, doesn't it? Perhaps it would be going too far not to have any government at all—and I don't see how that would help the poor, either."

Here the girl's father turned his large frame and broke into the conversation. "He don't go far enough, that Dutchman don't," Dircks declared. "He's too mild. We can't get along without policemen, either—we want them to jail the rascals in Wall Street—only I'd rather see some of them shot! Why, I—"

At this moment the president of the club was heard rapping again for silence, and all conversation ceased. In the same flowing rhetoric he presented the second speaker, Mr. Arnold Gillingham, the editor of the *Wall Street Standard*.

Mr. Gillingham was undersized and underbred. But those who were offended by his rasping voice and by his domineering gestures could not but admit the ability with which he presented his unwelcome views. He began by saying that he would detain the members of the Contemporary Club but a short time, as he could not pay them the poor compliment of thinking that they were imposed upon by such shallow sophistries as they had been forced to listen to that evening. He confessed that he had neither respect nor toleration for professional agitators, who are revolutionists for revenue only; and he did not know which is the more detestable, the dress-coat dynamiter or the parlor socialist. The real leaders of reform have always been men willing to make every sacrifice—of place, of money, and,

if need be, of life itself. The professional agitator, who goes comfortably from drawing-room to drawing-room dealing out the doctrine of discontent and riot and rapine and murder, is risking nothing—nothing but his digestion. The only sacrifice he is ready to make is like the one proposed by Artemus Ward—the sacrifice of his wife's relations.

Mr. Gillingham went on to declare that the German gentleman had been right in saying that his beatific vision of anarchy would be the millennium. It would not come to pass till all the ordinary men and women in the world had died off and the globe was repeopled with angels. The policeman and the judge and the soldier are the buttresses of civilization; they are the forces that keep the appetites of man in check and under control. As Aristotle told us two thousand years ago and more, there is no end of talk about equalizing our riches, while what is urgent is to equalize our desires. And Heine reminded us half a century ago that communism made its appeal in a language understood by all the peoples of the earth, and that the elements of this universal language were as simple as hunger and envy and death—all easy enough to learn. If you persist in talking about the irrepressible conflict between the classes and the masses—that is, between those who have and those who haven't—you are really exciting to riot. If you keep telling men that the bloody conflict is bound to come sooner or later, they are the quicker to act now; they want to get at the fighting and have it over, and enjoy the spoils of war. That is what the parlor socialist and the dress-coat dynamiter are doing—they are making it necessary for the forces that stand for law and order

to get ready to sweep the streets with the gatling-guns of the regular army. And whenever that kind of street-cleaning is to take place, it will be best for those who are on the side of the broom and worst for those who are swept into the gutter—for the gutter will run with blood.

So vehement was the manner of Mr. Gillingham that the applause broke forth heartily when he sat down, even though his personality was repugnant to many.

The president asked Herr Kreutzner if he wished to make any rejoinder; and the calm German answered, courteously, that he saw no necessity for so doing, as the logic of his position had not been assailed.

Thereupon the president announced, humorously, that the feast of reason and the flow of soul had come to an end, and that the guests of the club would find in the reception-room adjoining a flow of coffee and feast of cakes.

CHAPTER VII

The chairs were pushed back and disarranged as people pressed towards the room where the refreshments were.

"Gillingham just gave it to that nihilist, didn't he?" Sartain heard one voice ask; and another answered, "That's so. Sharp as a steel-trap, isn't he?"

Dircks overheard this also. His face was flushed with the excitement of the debate and his black eyes were fiery under his fierce eyebrows. He was forging ahead of his daughter and Sartain, who followed in his wake as he thrust the chairs right and left out of his way. Now he slowed up a little and spoke over his shoulder to Sartain, who was close behind him. "Gillingham?" he said, taking no pains to lower his voice, "is that the little fellow's name? Well, he's a skunk, that's what he is! And I'll tell him so if I get a chance to-night. He's a liar, too!"

Sartain looked about to see if any one had heard this unconventional outbreak, but he saw no reason to suppose that it had attracted any attention.

As they came near to the door they found themselves approaching Mr. Vivian and his eldest daughter, who promptly took possession of Esther.

"What did you think of the debate?" the novelist asked.

"It was very interesting indeed," the young man answered. "I don't hold with anarchy, but that German stated his case well, and I liked his sincerity."

Dircks agreed with a nod of his head. "He meant what he said, that's plain."

"That may well be," Vivian admitted, "yet they were wild and whirling words, after all. But Gillingham, now, did you not think he was sincere, too?"

"No," said Dircks, gruffly; "the fellow is a skunk."

"I don't really know," Sartain answered. "But whatever his sincerity, he has no sympathy. There isn't a drop of blood in him!"

"That's what I meant!" Dircks declared, approvingly.

"Well," Vivian rejoined, "he lacks sympathy, I'll admit. The only fellow he has any feeling for is himself. I've known him for years, and he seems to me a type of the hard-headed, sharp-eyed, keen-witted, self-satisfied man, quite able to hold his own in this plutocracy of ours, the existence of which he accepts complacently as inevitable, if not as ideal. He's made his paper pay, too."

"That's the worst of New York," Sartain said; "there isn't any paper on the poor man's side—except a fool paper or two. The best of the great dailies are owned in Wall Street, and do Wall Street's dirty work. Even the weeklies are most of them plutocratic. I've often wondered if there wasn't an opening here for a journal which should be really progressive and ready to advocate advanced views with force and dignity and weight. Most of the reviews in which a man can speak out freely are open also to every crank in the country."

"Yes," commented Vivian, with his playful smile, "I suppose it must be irritating to a serious reformer to find himself forced to associate with the health-food advocates, and the believers in Christian science, and with all sorts of wild asses."

"I've often thought about a paper," Sartain went on, "which should voice the demands of the new day, and yet so readable it would get a big circulation."

"Have you got a hundred thousand dollars in the bank to start it with?" Vivian asked, jocularly.

"It wouldn't take as much as that, would it?" the young man returned.

"I shouldn't think it safe to publish a new weekly, even without illustrations, with less than fifty thousand, at all events," the novelist declared, "and a hundred thousand might not be enough in the end. Perhaps some philanthropic millionaire will endow a reform weekly one of these fine days, and you may be appointed editor."

"Perhaps," Sartain returned, in the same tone; "but I don't believe I'd better give up my job with Carington & Company just yet."

Dircks listened to this easy talk with obvious interest, and yet without taking part in it. Now Vivian addressed him, and left Sartain free to join Esther and Johnny.

While he had been conversing with their fathers he had seen them sitting side by side, and he had observed Adams supplying them with refreshments.

"I didn't see you here during the debate," he said to the artist.

"And you never will," Adams responded. "I calculate too carefully for that. I try to hit the hour

just too late for the gabble and not too late for the gobble. To-night I got here not five minutes before the eloquence was turned off, and I've done my duty —I've provided cold victuals for two poor girls, and now I'm going to get a bite for myself."

"One of the poor girls would like a *marron glacé*," said Esther.

"Let me get it for you!" exclaimed Sartain, springing forward.

"Well, it *is* your turn now," the artist allowed, as they started towards the refreshment-table together.

When Sartain was able to return with a dishful of chestnuts and macaroons, he found that Adams was also back again with a plate of salad for himself.

He longed to take the girl he loved apart, to have her all to himself, apart from this glitter and this babble; he would have liked to snatch her away so that he alone could talk to her without interruption. But he discovered that Esther Dircks listened to Adams with pleasure, as though his liveliness amused her —or was it that she was really interested in the painter? As that suggestion flashed upon him, Sartain found himself ready to hate Adams.

"You made a mistake to-night, Madams," said Johnny, "not to get here for the speeches. They were really interesting, particularly what that German nihilist said."

"I know the sort of thing you had to listen to," Adams retorted—"the speech that is an hour and forty minutes passing a given point. And that's sheer waste of time, because you can boil the nihilist doctrine down to a single sentence—nobody ain't never to have nothing nohow."

Just then an old lady arose and left vacant the seat next to Esther. Adams dropped into it at once.

"Isn't there something else that you want?" he asked her. "If there is, send Sartain for it. I'm too weary to budge."

"He's pretty cool, isn't he?" laughed Esther.

"He is, indeed," Johnny answered; "when he comes down to stay with us in the country we use him to freeze the ice-cream for us."

"I wonder where this club gets all the cranks and the freaks it exhibits," Adams remarked. "It must have a quarry of its own where it digs them up—that is, unless it borrows them from the Museum of Natural History. In all my life I never saw such a crowd of long-haired men and short-haired women. Nihilists? Well, I should think so. Who wouldn't want to be annihilated if he looked like the strange wild beasts they have here?"

"Really, you ought not to talk that way," said Esther, gently. "Father nearly always finds the debates here very enjoyable."

"Oh, your father—" began Adams, who suddenly checked himself, and continued, lamely, "your father—well, he's very good-natured, that's all—he's easily pleased."

"Do you say that because he likes you, Madams?" asked Johnny, slyly, whereat Esther and Sartain laughed heartily.

The artist joined in the merriment. "That's one for you," he said. "I'm keeping tab on the number of times you score off me, and you are nearly even now."

Again Sartain wished that he had the assurance of Adams, the self-control and even temper. It struck

him that Esther liked to have the artist sitting by her side, and that there was now a certain air of animation about her which he had failed to note before. Apparently the fixity of his stare attracted her attention, for she looked up, and their glances met, and he dropped his eyes, but not before he had seen her bright smile. While he was reproaching himself for his rudeness, it pleased him to think that she did not dislike him seemingly, and that, at all events, she treated him in a friendly fashion.

"Is Johnny's father easy to please, too?" asked Esther, as the pause in the conversation protracted itself, "for he likes the Contemporary, you know."

"Oh, Mr. Vivian," the artist returned, "he comes here to get characters. All novelists are always looking for new characters—just as painters are after new models."

"Madams," said Johnny, "do you think my father is as much in need of a new character as—well, as others who are here to-night?"

While Esther and Sartain were laughing at this second hit, the artist raised a deprecating hand.

"That isn't one on me," he cried. "I deny that one. My character is like my conscience—it's in excellent repair."

"I suppose that's because your conscience is in no danger of being worn out by over-use," Johnny suggested, with her eyes twinkling behind her little gold eye-glasses.

"You can count that one," Adams admitted. "I left them in position for you, and it was my fault you made your carom. But you ask your father if he doesn't think that the creatures who come to this Con-

temporary Club of his are a very variegated lot. Why, he told me himself yesterday that one man whom he had invited for to-night had accepted on a postal-card. On a postal-card! That tells you what kind of being comes here. I wish I knew who it was; but your father wouldn't tell me."

If Adams happened to look up, and had seen the blood rush to Sartain's face, and then slowly recede, he might have guessed easily that the being who had been guilty of this act stood before him.

Perhaps Esther perceived the blush and divined the redness; and perhaps Johnny knew. At any rate, both of the girls promptly came to Sartain's relief.

"I don't see that that is so very awful," said Esther. "Why shouldn't a man write on a postal?"

"What are postal-cards for, anyhow?" Johnny asked. "Why does the government print them, if you won't allow a man to use them?"

Sartain said nothing. He was grateful to the girls for their defence of his act; and yet he burned all over at the thought that perhaps they suspected him, and were championing his cause from feminine tact.

"What are knives for?" retorted the artist. "Not to eat pie."

Sartain felt that he ought to intervene in the discussion. He swallowed a lump in his throat, and began with an inarticulate murmur, which made them all look up. Whereupon he felt more uncomfortable than ever and blushed again.

"In the Middle West," he managed to say, at last, "I think it would be allowable to use a postal-card to accept an invitation—I mean—that is—from one man to another."

"Oh, the Middle West," returned Adams. "If you mean Chicago, I know all about it. I went out there once to paint a couple of portraits. Well, in the Middle West, then, they give you tea with your dinner. Now, a man who wants tea with his dinner would write a proposal of marriage on a postal-card, I don't doubt. And when he comes East on a cattle-train, he is invited to the Contemporary Club. That's what I said at first, didn't I?"

Johnny seemed to think that this conversation had lasted long enough. "Madams," she said, holding out her empty ice-cream plate, "I will graciously permit you to put this down for me."

"Allow me," said Sartain, taking it from her, and then relieving Esther also of her plate.

"That's right," Adams declared, as he continued to eat his own salad. "You let Sartain wait on you. I've served my time. Besides, if I were to get up, he would take my seat—and I am very comfortable as I am."

"Can't I get you some more ice-cream?" Sartain asked.

"No, thank you," Esther responded. "But I hope you will get something for yourself."

"That's so," agreed Johnny. "The poor man hasn't had a bite yet."

Sartain took the two empty plates to the long table in the centre of the room, brilliant with candelabra and crowded with silver dishes; and in time he was able to get one of the waiters to give him a croquette or two, and a few leaves of lettuce.

When he tried to return he had to twist in and out through a throng of ladies. On the edge of this

feminine maze he found Johnny, who had risen to speak to a passing friend. Now, instead of returning to her seat by the side of Esther, she seemed to prefer standing.

"I'm glad you were able to get your salad at last," she began, and he had to take his stand beside her. "Sometimes, when there is a crowd like this, we run out of something."

Sartain looked over Johnny's broad shoulder at Adams sitting by the side of Esther and talking to her with animation. He wished that Johnny was not detaining him and that he could go over and thrust himself into the conversation of the others.

Then suddenly he bethought himself how rude he must seem to Mr. Vivian's daughter in not responding to her remark; and so he declared at last, as though he had been trying to make up his mind about it, "This salad is really very good, isn't it?"

"It isn't half bad, as they say in London," she answered; "but if you are a judge of salads, I must get papa to make you one."

"Mr. Vivian make a salad!" he ejaculated in surprise, wondering how long Adams was going to sit there next to Esther Dircks.

"You didn't know papa did that sort of thing?" Johnny asked. "Well, he does, and he's very proud of it, too. He says he's willing to admit that old Dumas could write a more popular novel than he can, but he denies that Dumas could make a better salad."

Some of Johnny's ways had struck him at first as unduly mannish, but she had feminine tact also, for she was able to put him at his ease. Having been in love with Esther from the first hour he had spoken to

her, the young man had neglected the other girls he had met that same afternoon; they had interested him merely as her friends and associates. But this evening, captured on his way to join Esther, he was forced to consider Johnny. To his surprise he discovered that she was really almost handsome. She was about of his own age and almost of his own height. Like her sisters she was inclined to be plump; but her figure though full was a little slighter than theirs. There was a hint of masculine severity in the simplicity of her well-cut evening-gown, but even this suited her style, so Sartain admitted.

Probably he let the conversation drop, for Johnny noted the direction of his gaze and turned so that she could see what he was looking at.

Then she deftly shifted the subject of their talk. "Isn't that delicate shade of blue becoming to Esther?" she said.

"It is, I suppose," Sartain responded, "but then I should think Miss Dircks would look well in anything."

"Yes," said Johnny, cordially, "her coloring is exquisite. It's no wonder an artist like Madams admires her so much."

"Admires her so much?" he repeated, stupidly, as he held his fork suspended half way to his mouth.

"Can't you see that he simply adores her?" she replied. "Where are your eyes? Just look at him this very minute."

Now that Sartain had been told, he could see how devotedly the artist was addressing the girl. A chill dread clutched his heart as he asked a question.

"Are they—are they engaged?"

"Oh dear, no," Johnny answered.

Sartain drew in a long sigh of relief, straightened himself up, and squared his shoulders.

"At least, they are not engaged yet," returned Johnny. "But of course I do not know what may happen sooner or later. Madams must have proposed to her three or four times, I should suppose, and Esther always rejects him, and he refuses to be discouraged. Perhaps, *à la longue*, as they say in Paris, she may change her mind."

"She may change her mind!" Sartain echoed, automatically, as his heart sank again. A waiter happened to pass then, and he thrust into the man's hands his plate with the most of the croquette still on it.

"You see, Madams is a very amusing fellow," she continued. "He is good company always. Perhaps some day Esther will discover that he is not a bad thing to have in the house."

Again Sartain contrasted himself with Adams, to his own disadvantage. Yet he refused to admit that the artist's affection for Esther, great as it might be—and it was the older undoubtedly—was as powerful as his own. With all the ardor of youth he believed that love must respond to love. So he took heart again, and in his mind he made ready for a long struggle. The odds were against him, no doubt, but he was no coward, and he refused to admit that he could be beaten, however superior his rival might be.

"Yes," he managed to repeat, "Mr. Adams is good company."

"And he is a rising man, too," Johnny declared. "For all his willingness to play the fool and make us laugh and all that, he takes his art very seriously."

"Does he?" asked Sartain, wondering whether any one of Adams's pictures was better in its way than *Dust and Ashes,* and resolving at once to begin a new book, which should be wholly without the defects he had already perceived in his first novel.

"Yes," Johnny went on. "Papa says that to hear Madams talk you wouldn't think he could paint at all, but he can. He had a second medal at the Salon last year."

"Indeed?" Sartain commented, instantly wishing there was in literature some equivalent for the Salon, where novelists might compete for medals.

"And he's one of the best illustrators in New York," Mr. Vivian's daughter added. "Papa would rather have Madams make the pictures for his stories than anybody else."

Sartain let his fancy travel swiftly into the future; and in his mind he promptly arranged all the details of the scene in which, after he was engaged to Esther, and after the editor of the *Metropolis* had accepted his serial—either *Dust and Ashes,* or the better story he was going to write next—he should suggest that he would like to have Mr. Emerson Adams employed to prepare the illustrations. Then the absurdity of this vain imagining suddenly struck him and he laughed bitterly.

Johnny looked at him in surprise, and he made haste to apologize awkwardly, confessing frankly that his attention had wandered.

"That's not very complimentary to me, is it?" she asked, with a slight flush.

The young man involved himself in further explanations, in the course of which his mind went astray again, for he saw Esther had been left alone, and his

immediate desire was to rush to her and capture the empty chair by her side. He recognized, however, that he could not leave Johnny standing alone. His first thought was to get her to gravitate with him towards her father, to whom he might abandon her without discourtesy. While he was endeavoring to accomplish this manœuvre, he wondered why it was that Esther did not join them. She sat there alone quite tranquilly, and once she caught Sartain's eye and they exchanged a smile; but she made no motion to rise. He could not ask her to come to him, and he could not break away to go to her. Fortunately the throng was now thinning; and as Sartain once and again stepped out of the way of ladies who wished to say good-night to friends on the other side of the room, he was able to guide Johnny nearer and nearer to Mr. Vivian.

But to Sartain's disappointment, just as he was about to answer some casual remark of Johnny's by an appeal to her father, whereby the other group would be included in their conversation, Mr. Vivian detached himself from Dircks and Adams and walked over to Esther.

At the risk of repeating his rudeness to Johnny, Sartain kept watch on the woman he loved and on the man who was now talking to her. He noted the smile of pleasure with which she welcomed Mr. Vivian, and the self-possession with which she suggested that he take the seat by her side.

And then to Sartain's astonishment he saw the same look in Mr. Vivian's eyes when they were fixed on Esther Dircks that he had already seen in Adams's. Did this mean that the elder novelist was also in love with her? Sartain doubted whether this would not

be a more serious rivalry than the artist's. But what right had Mr. Vivian to enter the lists against a young man ?—he had had one wife already, and that was his full share ; besides, he had a daughter older than Esther, and it was indecent of him to make love to her.

So perturbed was he by this strange discovery that he omitted to support his share of the conversation with Johnny.

At last, when he had failed to make any response to a remark of hers repeated twice, Mr. Vivian's daughter followed the direction of his stare and discovered that he was gazing at Esther. Again the flush came into her cheeks and this time it lingered a little longer. With no further attempt to recall the attention of the young man, she turned to Adams, who was now at her elbow talking to Mr. Dircks.

Sartain stood there alone for a minute or two, watching every expression that fleeted over Esther's face. To his surprise, he saw that the attentions of Mr. Vivian, old as the man was, were welcome to her, and that she seemed to enjoy his conversation, laughing gayly. Sartain had conceived of Esther as an ethereal being, so spiritual as to be above all mortal failings. Now he asked himself if he had been wholly mistaken and if the girl were merely a heartless coquette.

How long he stood there in self-torture, twisting the end of his beard, in the middle of the rapidly depleting crowd, he did not know. Then he recovered his self-possession. Blushing at the rudeness with which he had treated Johnny, he looked up to find that she was no longer before him. He turned hastily, to discover her by his side, chatting with Mr. Dircks and Adams.

"I beg your pardon," he began, clumsily. "I — I don't know what came over me just then. I'm afraid my—my wits were wool-gathering."

"Don't apologize," she said, icily. "It is of no consequence, I assure you."

"My wits go wool-gathering sometimes," Adams remarked, "and—"

"And then it's a case of much cry and little wool!" Johnny interrupted, with a hard laugh. The flush had gone from her face, but there was a tiny spot of red high on each cheek.

"Little Bo-Peep, I am not one of your sheep," the artist retorted. "I'm my own master."

"I don't think it is a proof of self-possession that you should be able to give yourself away so often," Johnny rejoined. "Do you?"

"I'm not always self-possessed," Adams responded. "I'm either abounding in assurance or else I'm excessive in awkwardness. Why, I've put my foot in it so often I'm sometimes afraid I must be really a centipede."

In his existing state of mind Sartain was glad that he was not called upon to take part in the conversation. He listened to it perfunctorily, having again changed his position so as to bring Esther and Vivian again within his range of vision. He did not notice that Dircks had suddenly left them, after having stood for a while looking gravely from under his beetling eyebrows at one and then at the other, as though trying to puzzle out the real meaning of what they said.

His attention was soon called to Dircks by Adams.

"Hello! hello!" cried the artist—"what is the old man up to now?"

In the doorway they saw the large figure of Dircks, with his huge hand grasping the shoulder of a little man, who was obviously very much frightened at the violence and the unexpectedness of the attack.

"It's like that little Mr. Gillingham, isn't it?" asked Johnny.

"So it is," said the artist; "and the old man has him under his paw, just like a big Newfoundland getting ready to shake the life out of a terrier."

"The dog that would be as scared as that fellow is," Sartain declared, "would be only a mongrel cur."

"I wonder what the matter is," said Johnny.

Then Sartain recalled the threat he had heard Dircks make after the debate, to tell Gillingham what he thought of him. He stepped forward at once, not knowing to what lengths the old man might intend to proceed. The president of the club came up at the same moment, on the opposite side, in time to see Dircks release his hold on the smaller man's coat, and to hear the little editor assert, angrily, that he had never been so insulted in his life.

"That's all right," Dircks declared, looking down at his victim. "You needn't look so scart. I'm through with you. I made up my mind I'd tell you what a liar you were, and I've done it. That's all. You can go now. I wouldn't have laid hands on you at all, but you kept trying to inch out of the room."

Dircks, having made this explanation, placidly left Gillingham to recover from his fright, under the consolations of the president.

"There wa'n't no need of his being so scart," explained Dircks, calmly, to Sartain. "He might have

known I wa'n't going to soil my hands on a little skunk like him. Of course I could have wrung his neck, if I'd a mind to."

Not a third of the audience was now left in the reception-room, and the fact that there had been an altercation of some sort was apparent to all, from the shrill protests of Gillingham.

Esther came speeding towards her father, and Sartain joyed in the grace of her movements.

"Father," she asked, gently, "what have you been doing to him?"

"I told you I'd give him a piece of my mind," he answered, gravely and wholly without excitement. "Well, I got the chance and I've done it. It's all over now. He's had his medicine, and he had to take it, and there's an end. That's all there is to it."

Sartain saw that the girl was trembling. "There's no occasion for alarm, Miss Dircks," he said; "your father was very gentle with the man."

"Father does take so much interest in politics," she said, "and he gets so excited sometimes that I never know what he is going to do."

"He didn't hurt anybody this time," Sartain assured her, glad to have the girl to himself again. "Gillingham needn't have been so frightened."

"It was very good of you to go over to them at once," Esther said, looking in his eyes, "and I thank you for it."

Sartain glowed with delight.

"Oh, that was nothing," he began, "absolutely nothing. There was never any danger to anybody. You alarmed yourself unnecessarily."

"Well, Esther," called Dircks, and when addressing

his daughter his voice was less gruff than at other times, "it's time for us to go, I guess."

"I'm ready now, father," she answered.

Sartain could not be sure, but he thought that she whispered a suggestion to her father, and he certainly saw the old man's glance, seeking some one, resting finally on him.

Then Johnny and Esther went off to the ladies' dressing-room for their wraps. In the hall there was a stream of people pressing towards the door, the women carefully hooded and the men with their overcoats on, some of them having lighted their cigars in the cloak-room.

Sartain heard one very thin lady say to a friend as she passed, "Very enjoyable evening, wasn't it?"

"Quite an intellectual treat, I call it," the other woman answered.

Dircks laid his large hairy hand on Sartain's arm.

"Come and see us," he said, cordially. "Sunday afternoon's the best time. My girl is always home then. We live in Stuyvesant Square. It's quieter down there."

"Thank you, Mr. Dircks," Sartain answered, his heart leaping with joy. "I shall be delighted to call next Sunday."

Only when he had bid them all good-night and was walking down Fifth Avenue by himself did he discover that, in his satisfaction at the invitation, he had forgotten to inquire what was Mr. Dircks's address. He blamed himself for this severely, and wondered why he always made a fool of himself, and asked himself when he would ever have any common-sense. The blunder was not irreparable he knew, as he had

no doubt that before Sunday he could find out from the Vivians where it was that Esther lived.

And another thought came to console him before he reached the door of the boarding-house in Irving Place. It struck him suddenly that perhaps the invitation came from Esther herself—that perhaps this was what she had suggested to her father, and this was why the old man had looked around for him.

CHAPTER VIII

During the next two or three days Sartain went over in his mind every incident of the memorable evening at the Contemporary Club. He jotted down his impressions for future literary use; and he began to plan how he could make them available in the new novel of New York life which he intended to undertake soon. He foresaw already that it would be possible for the hero first to display himself to the public in a debate at the Contemporary Club, disclosing great gifts of oratory and triumphantly annihilating the shallow sophistries of the other speakers. Soon it occurred to him that here was the best possible opening chapter for the new novel, an opening chapter like the first act of a play, in which all the characters are introduced and the theme is clearly presented. There would be a chance to start the story with a brilliant and broadly brushed picture, quite in the Daudet manner, good in itself and better as a preparation for what was to follow. Then the outline of the tale began to suggest itself dimly to him. The young orator would be an ardent reformer, coming from the pure country to redeem the sordid city. Probably in this narrative of the hero's efforts Sartain would be able to describe all the attractive phases of life in New York — attractive from a literary point of view, he

meant. Perhaps the eloquent young countryman would be rich at first, and he might lose his fortune through the rascality of the heroine's father. If the hero were to be desperately poor for a while, the author could use a title he had long had in mind —*A Wolf at the Door* — more enticing, it seemed to him, even than *Dust and Ashes*. He intermitted the plotting of the new tale long enough to visualize its title on a pictorial poster with a realistic wolf waiting hungrily at the snow-covered door-step.

As Sunday drew nigh he wondered how he was to ascertain where Esther Dircks and her father lived. The Vivians would be at home on Saturday afternoon, he knew; and he could, of course, call on them and ask for the address. But his face burned red whenever he recalled either the postal-card he had written to accept the invitation or the rudeness with which he had treated Johnny at the Contemporary. Whenever he dwelt on this he was ready to declare that New York was too much for him — too complicated, too sophisticated—and to resolve that he had best go back at once to Topeka.

As he was getting ready to leave his office on Saturday he saw the art-editor pass the door; and then it occurred to him that this gentleman, who had arranged for all the illustrations required in the many publications of Carington & Company, probably would know the address of an engraver.

"Old Raphael Dircks?" the art-editor answered, when Sartain put the question to him. "He lives over in Stuyvesant Square, somewhere. Let me see—I've got his address here, I think. Yes, that's it—I'll write it on a card for you. It is an out-of-the-way part of

the town, on Second Avenue, you know. Sunday afternoons it's Lover's Lane; it's a regular courting-ground for the shop-girls and their beaus."

Sartain put the card in his pocket; and that afternoon he went across to see where it was that Esther lived. He found the house easily; it was a spacious, old-fashioned dwelling, on the northern side of the square, beyond Second Avenue. Little as the young man from the West knew about the rentals of houses in New York, he did not believe it possible that Esther's father could afford to pay for the whole of a residence so ample.

As he walked past he saw that there were the mouths of four speaking-trumpets in the vestibule, visible through the open door, and he guessed then that this meant the dwelling was now let in separate flats. He would have liked to go up the stoop and to see what floor the Dirckses had, that he could make sure which windows Esther might look out of. But he did not dare venture on this, feeling that it would be an intrusion.

The next afternoon—Sunday—when Sartain mustered up his courage and set forth to avail himself of Mr. Dircks's invitation to call, the appearance of Stuyvesant Square was not attractive, for the day was moist and misty, and a drizzle of rain dripped from the few bare trees.

Under each of the four speaking-tubes were a bell-pull and a letter-box with the name of the owner upon it. Sartain saw that the Dirckses lived on the third floor. He pulled the bell and waited. A minute later he heard a click as of the opening of a lock, and then a remote and mysterious voice invited him to "Come up."

Turning around, he found that the door was now ajar, and he guessed that the click had been due to the pulling of the bolt by some hidden wire from upstairs.

He entered and closed the door behind him. At four o'clock on a rainy November afternoon the hall was so dark that he had to grope his way. There was a stale smell of cooking; and as he went up the second flight of stairs he heard the snapping notes of a banjo. When he arrived at the third floor he hesitated, not knowing which door he ought to knock at. Finally he made a choice, and rapped firmly. The low voice of Esther Dircks bade him come in; and thereupon he opened the door.

The room which he entered was fairly large, and it had two windows looking out on the square. Esther sat in a rocking-chair between the window and the fireplace, red with a hard-coal fire. She had a bundle of bills on her lap, and a blank-book, in which she was making figures.

"Sit down," she said, without raising her eyes from her calculations. "Father will be here in a few minutes."

Sartain stood silently, surprised to be received so unceremoniously.

Probably the constraint of his attitude attracted her attention in some way, for she looked up.

"Oh!" she cried, in surprise. "Why, it's Mr. Sartain!"

It seemed to the young man that the color came across the pale cheeks and went again at once. But she had her back to the dim light, and he could not be sure.

"Didn't you expect me?" he began. "I—I mean that I have availed myself at once of your kind invitation—and—and—"

"My kind invitation?" she repeated.

"Your father's kind invitation, I mean," he explained. "He—he asked me to call some Sunday—and—and so I came to-day."

"I must have seemed very rude to you," she said, when he hesitated again. "But I thought you were Mr. Adams."

"Did you?" Sartain asked, with a swift pang of jealousy that the artist should be on a more friendly footing with her than he was.

"Do take off your overcoat," she said, "and you can have that comfortable seat by the fire here. It is a miserable day, isn't it? Mr. Adams says that this kind of weather must have been imported from England in the *Mayflower*."

"So you were expecting Adams this afternoon?" was the question that Sartain asked, almost unwittingly, as he took the chair in front of her.

"We were not exactly expecting him," the girl returned; "at least, not this afternoon particularly. But he often drops in on Sundays. Father likes to hear him talk."

"And you do too?" was Sartain's next question; and he had no sooner uttered it than he was aware that it was an impertinence.

"Oh yes, indeed," she responded, frankly. "I think Mr. Adams is the most amusing man I know. He is so unexpected in what he says; don't you think so?"

Sartain again regretted that he was not a ready talker,

and that his conversation was not unexpected also. Yet he thought that perhaps there was something reassuring in the careless way Esther spoke of Adams; if she were in love with a man, surely she would not call him amusing and unexpected; and he wondered if she would speak of Vivian in the same tone.

"Yes," he answered, "Adams is bright. But I don't think his conversation has the charm of Mr. Vivian's."

"Perhaps not," she returned, "for it is always a pleasure to hear Mr. Vivian talk. He makes everything so clear; and he is so kind to me, too. He always explains things to me; and he is ever so patient. I am just as ignorant as can be, you know, and he doesn't seem to mind that at all."

From her manner Sartain could not guess whether or not she had any suspicion that Vivian was in love with her. For the first time Sartain recognized how appalling is the inscrutability of woman.

"He is very kind, as you say," Sartain responded. "Nobody knows that better than I—for it is all owing to him that I am here now."

She looked up at him with her illuminating smile.

"That's a compliment to me, isn't it?" she asked, gayly. "Do you want me to get up and courtesy to you?"

"Oh no," he replied, in confusion. "No—what I meant was that I shouldn't have met you if he had not asked me into his parlor that afternoon when you were posing as Cinderella."

"I think I saw what you meant," she returned. "And I don't wonder at all that you are glad to go to the Vivians'. I am, too. I'm always so delighted

to be with the girls, because they talk about people, you know, while father is always talking about things. Now, I think persons are ever so much more interesting than things. I just love to get with Theo and Dora, and have a good gossip, and make fun of everybody we know."

"That must be delightful," said Sartain, ruefully, aware that he was probably one of those whom the twins had made fun of. The memory of that unlucky postal-card blazed again in his cheeks. "I suppose you were there yesterday afternoon?"

"We were at the opera," she answered; "it was the first matinée of 'Lohengrin,' and father never misses anything of Wagner, if we can help it."

That the rough-looking Dircks should go to the opera struck Sartain as a strange incongruity, and stranger still was the old man's preference for Wagner.

"I suppose that is one of the great advantages of living in a big city like this," he said. "You have the opera, not for a night or two, as we did sometimes in Topeka, if we were lucky, but four or five times a week, for four or five months at a stretch. Here you don't have to wait till the opera comes around; it is here, and you can go as often as you want."

"Indeed we can't," she returned, laughing. "I wish we could, for father enjoys it so much, and I am sure it does him good. But we can't afford it! When you knocked at the door just now, I was going over our accounts to see how we were coming out this month, for I know father will want to go next Saturday. It's the 'Meistersinger,' you know."

"No, I don't know," Sartain answered. "You must remember I've been three years in Topeka, and before

that I was four winters in Providence; and then I wasn't rich enough to run on to Boston and go to the opera more than once in a season."

"It's a pity good opera is so dear, isn't it?" she asked. "Or perhaps it would be better if only very rich people really cared for expensive music."

"That is one of the problems to be solved in the future—how to prevent art from being the monopoly of the plutocrat," he replied, finding phrases easily now, since he had written many an article on the theme, "and especially the theatre and the opera. Architecture the man in the street can enjoy almost as much as the man who built the house, and in time mural decoration will be applied to all public buildings, including the railroad stations, so that everybody will have a chance to see good painting. But just how to get good music and good acting for the man who can't pay a dollar for a seat, I don't see yet. If the State were to interfere, I'm afraid the arrangement of the repertory would be the result of 'pulls' and of 'influoence.' I think that one of the disadvantages of limiting wealth will be discovered to be that we shall then deprive ourselves of the public services some rich men now render voluntarily to the community. There's that man in Boston, you know, who supports an orchestra, and the opera here in New York is paid for out of the pockets of the multi-millionaires who own the boxes."

"And they do talk so loud in their boxes," said Esther; "I don't believe they can really care for music at all—except, maybe, dance-music at their balls."

"Wasn't Cinderella rather fond of a dance herself?" he asked. "If I remember the tale, she had such a

good time at the ball that she outstayed the limits set by the fairy godmother. Now if you had a fairy godmother, you could go to the opera as often as you chose."

"It would be nice, wouldn't it?" the girl returned, smiling back at him. "But, you see, my fairy godmother isn't here. She's way out West, and she's very old, too, and I'm afraid she is very feeble."

"I didn't know you really had any such personage attached to your train," he declared.

"It's my grandmother, I mean," Esther explained. "She is almost eighty, and she lives out in Wisconsin now, and she has been bedridden for nearly a year. My mother died before I was ten, and she was an only daughter, and so grandma was always very fond of me. She is well off, too, and she is forever sending me pretty things—jewelry, sometimes, and dresses, and sometimes money, so that I can get what I want most. That's why I call her my fairy godmother. And she is really my godmother too."

And then their talk turned naturally to the recollections of their youth. She told him where she had spent her childhood, and he told her where he had passed his. She described the loneliness that seized her when her mother died suddenly, and he described his more mature sensations when he lost his mother. He was left all alone, and she had her father still, and her father seemed to be very strong, so Sartain said. Then she expressed her fear that her father was not really robust; and she explained how it was that he refused to take proper care of himself. This gave her a chance to set her father right in the young man's eyes by telling Sartain that an outbreak like that at the Contem-

porary was very unusual, and that he was rarely so violent; but he had brooded so much over the wrongs of the poor that it made him mad when a man misrepresented them in the way Mr. Gillingham had done. But ordinarily her father was gentle and quiet, and nobody could be kinder. Sartain answered that Mr. Dircks had a most benevolent aspect. She asserted that her father had never given her a cross look, even when she was a naughty little girl. Sartain refused to believe that she had ever been a naughty girl. Esther repeated her self-accusations, and protested that she had been very naughty sometimes. This led her to give him anecdotes of the pranks she and Dora and Theo had played at the boarding-school where they all were. Her grandmother had paid for her schooling, and the happiest hours of her life had been spent in the one large room that she and the twins had occupied together.

Sartain said, "Oh, that's how it is you know Miss Dora and Miss Theo so much better than you know Miss Joan."

"I love Johnny dearly," Esther returned, "but of course I don't know her half so well as I do Dora and Theo. Johnny is very handsome, don't you think?"

Sartain was not quick-witted and he was not sharp to seize the subtleties of feminine character, but now he suspected that he detected a different note in Esther's voice. And yet the question was put as though she really wanted his opinion.

"I don't know that I should call her handsome, exactly," he answered. "But she is certainly fine looking."

"You would think her handsomer, I'm sure," she

returned, "if only she didn't dress in that foolish way. It's absurd, isn't it, to see a girl as stout as she is wear tight things as she does?"

Sartain admitted that he did not like to see a woman affect man's apparel.

"By-the-way," he continued, "speaking of Miss Joan reminds me. The other evening at the Contemporary, when I was talking to her, Mr. Adams was called away and you were left alone—do you remember?"

"Oh yes," she answered.

"Well, then," he asked, "why didn't you get up and join us—join Miss Joan, I mean?"

"Oh, I couldn't," she replied.

"I don't see why not," said he. "We were both looking at you and expecting you to come; at least, I was hoping you would."

"That's just it," she responded, "you were there."

"Didn't you want to speak to me?" he asked, in aggrieved astonishment.

"You wouldn't understand if I told you why," she declared.

"Try me," he said.

"Oh, it wouldn't do at all," she returned. "No girl would have liked it. I know Johnny wouldn't."

"Wouldn't what?" he asked.

"No girl would like another girl to join her when she was talking to a man," she explained. "She would think I wanted to get him away from her."

"Surely Miss Joan couldn't have so contemptible an opinion of you as that!" he cried.

"Couldn't she?" Esther retorted. "You don't know girls if you think so."

"No," he answered, gravely, wholly at a loss to un-

derstand so extraordinary a phenomenon. "No, if girls are like that, I don't know girls. And I don't think I want to know women capable of harboring such mean thoughts."

"Oh, we are all alike!" Esther declared.

"I'm sure you wouldn't be guilty of such a thing," Sartain asserted.

"You may be sure Johnny will never join you and me if she sees us talking together some evening at the Contemporary!" was Esther's rejoinder.

If questioned, Sartain would have confessed that these subtleties of feminine psychology evaded him; they interested him also, and he felt sure that he ought to study the matter out—that it was his duty as a novelist to master all the details of woman's character. For the moment he held his peace, content to be with this one woman whom he loved and to gaze at her. The little wisp of golden hair came down again, and he took the same pleasure in the pettish gesture with which she thrust it back.

The brief twilight of New York was upon them, and the room was beginning to darken. The silence lasted so long that Sartain did not know how to break it. Then he heard a heavy footfall somewhere behind him and a door opened.

"There's father now," cried Esther; "and it's getting so dark here!"

As Mr. Dircks entered the room his daughter struck a match and lighted the two gas-jets over a table between the windows.

"Father, here's Mr. Sartain," she said.

Sartain rose to his feet and faced around to greet Mr. Dircks.

"So you inquired us out?" said the old man, whose tall frame seemed to Sartain larger than ever in this small room. "We're glad to see you," and he held out his huge hand and gave his visitor a hearty grasp.

The room was scantily furnished although it could scarcely be called bare. Besides the rocking-chair Esther had occupied and the chair Sartain had taken, there was also a cane settle against the wall opposite the fireplace; and here Dircks sat down.

He had a newspaper in his left hand, the forty-eight-page Sunday issue of the *Daily Dial;* and now he raised this up and said to his daughter, "I found a piece in the paper here I'd like you to read to me, Esther."

"You don't want me to read it aloud, do you, father?" the girl asked, as she took the newspaper from him, glancing a little doubtfully at Sartain.

"Why not?" her father answered. "You'll read it beautifully. Mr. Sartain will be glad to hear you."

"Indeed I shall!" cried the young man.

"Oh, very well," she responded, "since you wish it, father." She looked at the place Mr. Dircks had indicated. "Why, it's poetry!" she declared.

"And better than most—at least, so it seemed to me," her father returned. "Generally I don't read the stuff, but that piece somehow is different. You read it, and you'll see there's sense to it."

Without further demur, although not without another deprecatory glance at Sartain, she began to read a couple of stanzas quoted in the middle of a book review. She read simply and with intelligence. Her voice was low and musical; and it seemed to Sartain that her modulations were exquisite. This is what her father had given her to read:

ALTRUISM

A tale of toil that never is done, I tell;
  Of life where love's a fleeting wing
Across the toiler's murky hell
  Of endless, cheerless journeying;
I draw to thee the far-off poor
And lay their sorrows at thy door.

Thou shalt not rest while these thy kind
  Toil hopelessly in solitude;
Thou shalt not leave them out of mind—
  They must be reckoned with. The food
You eat shall bitter be
While law robs them and feedeth thee.

"That's true!" said Dircks. "While law robs them! There's lots of men being robbed by the law every day. Cut that out for me, Esther; I'll keep it."

Sartain had recognized the lines, and he was going to tell Dircks who their author was, when Esther rose and took a pair of scissors from the mantel-piece. His mind was called off to record again the grace of all her movements, which he involuntarily likened to those of a humming-bird.

Then Dircks broke out once more, "While law robs them! That's it. I can't say these things myself. I feel them, but I can't think them out. And so when I see a piece in the paper that says what I've been feeling, I cut it out and keep it."

"I suppose the law does rob some men," said Sartain; "but then we shall get the laws to our liking some day. Perhaps the income-tax will come first; they've got it in England, you know, and in Switzerland. Then there will be a succession-tax, properly

graduated to fall most heavily on the very wealthy. Maybe that will prepare the way for a limitation of the right of bequest; but that's in the future."

Mr. Dircks heard him eagerly. Evidently it was with deep joy that the old man listened to any attack on the existing order. Apparently also he was not moved by any theory of improvement, but rather by resentment against society as it was constituted. Sartain wondered almost whether Dircks's ardor for reform was not wholly personal, whether it was not the result of some injustice he himself had suffered.

"All these laws you want are good, of course—at least, I suppose so," Dircks declared, with a beetling of his brows. "But maybe the people who are being crushed down now won't wait for all of them; maybe they will take the law in their own hands some day."

With an appealing gesture to Sartain, Esther now sought to turn the talk.

"You mustn't be so violent, father," she intervened. "I should think you had had enough of fighting in the war."

Sartain was glad to come to her assistance promptly.

"So you were a soldier, Mr. Dircks?" he asked.

"Father won't talk about it," the girl continued, "but he served all through the war—and he has a bullet wound in his arm now."

"That's all over now," the old man declared—"that's all over. And what's a bullet in the arm, after all?"

"Father doesn't wear a little bronze button like the rest of the old soldiers, and he never parades with the old flags on Memorial Day," said Esther. "But I'm very proud of him all the same, if he isn't at all proud of

himself." Then she went to her father and petted him.

"My father served in a Rhode Island battery," Sartain was glad to be able to say. "And in the war of 1812 my grandfather was on the *Constitution* when she took the *Guerrière*."

"It isn't nice of me to boast against you," she returned, flashing her smile at him, "but father's grandfather fought at Lexington."

"Both of my grandfathers were in the Revolutionary War," Dircks interrupted.

"But I wasn't going to say anything about the other one," his daughter admitted, laughingly.

"One was on one side and one was on the other," the old man continued. "My mother's father was at Lexington and afterwards he served in the old Continentals. My father's father was a Hessian."

"I never tell anybody that!" Esther asserted; "never! But at school, in our history lessons, I always let out about the one at Lexington."

"He was a Hessian!" Dircks went on; "bought and sold like a dog! He was leased by his master to another man to fight for the other man, and if he didn't choose to fight he was licked."

"And I suppose he remained here after the peace, as so many of the Germans did?" suggested Sartain. "And that's how you come to be a New Englander with so foreign a name as Dircks—and yet that sounds rather Dutch than German, I think."

"And my name is Hebrew," said Esther; "and so is father's given name, Raphael."

This gave Sartain a chance to explain that his own family name was probably French, and that it was de-

rived from a Huguenot ancestor expelled from France on the revocation of the Edict of Nantes more than two centuries ago.

The shades had not been drawn down when the gas was lighted; and now Sartain, happening to look out, saw that it was already dark. He rose hastily and apologized for having made so long a call.

"Not at all," said Dircks, heartily. "Don't hurry."

When Sartain insisted, the old man added, "If you must go, come again. I like to talk to you, and I like to hear you talk."

The young man thanked him for the invitation and shook hands. Then he turned to the daughter.

"We are always at home on Sunday afternoons," she said, cordially.

"I shall come often—if I may," Sartain responded.

"I hope you will," she assented. Then she added: "It is always good for father to have a chat with some one who can talk about the things he is interested in."

CHAPTER IX

In the next few days Sartain recalled his talk with Esther very often. The glimpse of her childhood that she had given him was precious to him, and he was glad that he had been able also to tell her about his mother and about his own youth. He thought that he knew her a great deal better for that long exchange of confidences, and he hoped that she knew him better also.

On Saturday he had a brisk little note from Mr. Vivian, inviting him to eat his Thanksgiving turkey with them on the coming Thursday at half-past seven, and explaining that it would be a very little dinner, as Dircks and his daughter and Adams would be the only other guests. It was not on a postal-card that Sartain accepted this invitation, but on a sheet of Japanese vellum note-paper, which he had recently purchased at one of the Oriental stores.

Vivian's note he put away with its predecessor, first reading the two over again, and remarking on the care with which they were written. Both in expression and in penmanship they were models of neatness. The appearance of these little letters was like that of the man himself—it was the very perfection of conscientious finish.

Then it came to Sartain, strongly, that here was a most dangerous rival, if Vivian were really resolved

upon marrying Esther. The novelist was no longer a young man, it was true, but he was good-looking still, well-dressed always, and well-preserved, far more youthful in appearance than his actual years. When Sartain set himself beside Vivian he was acutely aware of his own disadvantages. Some day he hoped to show the world what was in him, but in the meanwhile he was a raw boy without fame or position or means. Mr. Vivian had all these; he was also an accomplished man of the world; he was not cursed with shyness; and he had tact. Sartain's heart sank within him as he set down the list of Vivian's superiorities, and yet he took courage again at the thought that after all Vivian was older, and had been married already, and could not love Esther as much as a young man who had all the career of his manhood still before him. Perhaps, after all, Adams was really more to be feared than Vivian.

And yet, when Sartain was shown into the Vivians' parlor on Thanksgiving evening, and the host came forward to greet him, the young man could not but hold the elder to be a formidable competitor. Jealousy lent sharpness to Sartain's examination of Vivian as he acknowledged his host's cordial greeting, and it was with a satisfaction he knew to be despicable that he marked how much grayer Vivian's beard was than he had taken it to be. But the keen face had a kindly expression, and the alert eye gave the new-comer a welcoming glance.

"You have met all my daughters, haven't you?" said Mr. Vivian; and Sartain replied that he had had that pleasure, stiffening himself not to be overwhelmed by the memory of the unfortunate postal-card which

the twins knew all about, and by the recollection of his more flagrant rudeness to the elder daughter at the meeting of the Contemporary Club.

He had bowed to the twins, making some inarticulate remark, and they severally responded, "So glad you were able to come, Mr. Sartain," and "Delighted to meet you again, Mr. Sartain." Then they resumed their own confab, interrupted by his arrival; and in half a minute they were again giggling away—a little to the young man's discomfort, for he feared that perhaps he was the target of their merriment.

He turned to Johnny, and to his great relief she greeted him with her usual heartiness, and set him at his ease at once. It was as though she had wholly forgotten how rudely he had neglected her the last time they had met. As he dropped into conversation with her, he looked at her with genuine admiration. In evening-dress she was really almost a handsome woman; her robust figure was only a little too full for her height. Her attire was even less mannish than it had been at the Contemporary. For one thing, her sleeve was short and displayed a beautiful forearm, which led Sartain to look at her hand for the first time; and he discovered that it, too, was beautiful—a little large, perhaps, and strong rather than delicate, but finely modelled and admirably proportioned. Sartain was as susceptible as most young men to the influence of sex and to the power of beauty; and yet his feeling towards Johnny was that, after all, she was a good fellow, and that it would be pleasant to be friends with her.

Before they had settled down into talk, Vivian got up again to shake hands with Adams, who nodded to Sartain, and was instantly seized by the twins.

"As we are all here now," said Vivian, "I suppose we may as well have dinner served." He went to the door and gave an order to the white-capped maid.

Sartain stared at Johnny in surprise. "All here!" he echoed, blankly. "Why, I—I thought that Miss Es—that Mr. Dircks and his daughter were coming too?"

"Yes," she answered, "we expected them; and we are all so disappointed they can't come."

"Can't come!" Sartain echoed again, his spirits sinking swiftly.

"They accepted at first," Johnny explained, "but yesterday morning Dora had a letter from Esther saying she had just had a letter from Madison, Wisconsin, with news of her grandmother's illness. The old lady is very feeble and probably she will not survive this attack. She was very fond of Esther—I've an idea she was her favorite grandchild, and so she begged her to come out and see her before she died. Of course, Esther and her father packed up at once, and they must be in Madison by this time. I only hope that she will find her grandmother alive—but it won't be a cheerful Thanksgiving for her anyway, will it?"

"No," said he, slowly, "it will not be cheerful for her," and he thought how cheerless his own Thanksgiving dinner would be now that he was disappointed in her presence.

The mood of taciturnity to which he was often a prey seized him again, and the conversation would have flagged more than once if Johnny had not chatted along.

As they rose to pass into the dining-room, Vivian said to Sartain, "Will you take my daughter in?"

Then he turned to Adams and the twins and asked, "Which of you goes in with me?"

"You can go in by your lonesome, papa," returned Dorothea.

"We cannot desert Madams," added Theodora.

With that the twins each took one of the artist's arms, and sent their father on before them by himself. Johnny and Sartain brought up the rear.

It was the first time that Sartain had ever been invited to a dinner so elegantly served. In spite of his sharp pang of disappointment that Esther Dircks was not to sit at the table with him he was awake to all the details of the service. The table was square, and it was lighted only by three candles in the candelabra at each corner. There was a superb basket of flowers in the centre, and here and there were little silver dishes with olives, nuts, candied fruit, and tiny frosted cakes.

Johnny took the seat at the head of the table and indicated to Sartain the chair on her right. Mr. Vivian stood at the foot, while Adams hesitated.

"Your place is on Johnny's left there," said the host. "I forget how you two little pests are to sit," he added, glancing from one to the other of the twins.

Dora and Theo looked at the two unoccupied places, one next to Adams and the other next to Sartain, and then they looked at each other and laughed.

"Let's draw lots," cried one of them.

"I'll go you!" returned the other, leaning over and picking out a couple of salted nuts. Placing her hands behind her for a moment, she extended her closed fists to her sister. "Now choose," she said. "If you get the chestnut, you sit next to Madams."

It was Theo who presented this dilemma to her sister, and while Dora was making her choice it struck Sartain that neither of the twins at all relished his society, and that he was obviously assigned to Johnny's care; and with a swift blush he asked himself if she were entertaining him merely as one of the disagreeable duties of the hostess. The question was salutary at that minute, for it gave him an incentive to put his best foot forward, and to show them that he was quite as good company as Adams.

Finally Dora chose the right hand—the chestnut was in the left; so it was Theo who sat between her father and the artist, and Dora who took the chair beside Sartain.

As they were unfolding their napkins, Johnny had a chance to call Adams's attention to the eternal fitness of things, in that the one of the twins who got the chestnut was to have him, to which the artist replied that if he were really a chestnut he had come that evening to be stuffed with turkey.

Sartain, left out of this interchange of obvious jest, ate his oysters in silence, and then forced himself to speak to the girl on his right.

"This little dinner of six is very like the one your father has described in the first chapter of *In Search of Himself*," he began. "Don't you think so?"

Theodora answered promptly, "I don't know," and looked across the table at Dorothea.

"And I don't know either," the other girl added. "You see, we have neither of us ever read any of papa's books."

Sartain stared from one to the other in intense surprise. "Never read your father's books?" he repeated.

"The fact is, we like papa too much to read what he writes," said Theo.

"And if we had read them and didn't happen to like them, I don't know what we should do!" Dora declared.

Sartain turned to Vivian, who nodded gravely and agreed. "It is a fact. They never do read my books; yet they can read and write themselves—after a fashion. I don't say that they can spell, but then I never could myself until I began to correct proof. Besides, what could I expect? I sent them to a school which professed to provide 'a collegiate education'—so I suppose I had no right to demand orthography."

"It's a mistake to teach girls how to read and write," broke in Adams. "It unfits them for society, where ignorance is bliss and where that girl is most attractive who is most willing to ask questions and to let men tell her things."

"I didn't go to the same school as Theo and Dora," said Johnny. "At my school we had a debating society, and the last question we discussed before I was graduated was 'Does a college education unfit a man for matrimony?'"

Adams laughed. "I think that was a fair thrust," he admitted. "All the same, I believe that the one insult no woman will ever forgive is an attempt to reason with her."

Johnny looked at him gravely and there came a little twinkle in her eye as she answered. "You ought to rejoice, Madams, that you are in no danger of ever proffering such an insult."

Sartain listened in silence, observing that Vivian liked to lead Adams on, and that he enjoyed the

crackle of jesting, although he rarely took part in it himself. After the artist had been setting forth certain extreme views at great length and with much coruscation of paradox, all the comment the host made was to say, slyly, "What a pity it is that Adams lacks the gift of dialogue."

So long as Esther Dircks was not present, Sartain did not mind how successfully Adams might show off; and her absence was in his thoughts whenever he let his mind wander from the immediate topic of the conversation. He had no need to exert himself to keep up the talk. Johnny and Mr. Vivian brought him in now and then just sufficiently to keep him from feeling left out. He was aware that they both had tact, and that they were using it in their relations with him; and although he was grateful for this, it annoyed him none the less. He wished more fervently than ever that Esther was there, since she was truly sympathetic. In her presence he expanded freely, and she had no need of tact.

A green-turtle soup had followed the oysters; and a pompano succeeded the soup. Then came broiled mushrooms, after which there were cutlets, cooked in a shell of paste with a delicious white sauce.

"Gracious, papa," cried Theo, "I've given up drinking water with my meals, and I eat toast now and no bread, but how can we help getting fatter and fatter if Johnny will have *cotelettes à la Soubise?*"

"These cutlets are fine!" said the artist. "Have you a new Chief now, or a Blue String only?"

"I don't know that we can even call her a Cordon Bleu," Vivian explained. "She is a Swede, but Johnny tries to keep her up to the mark. And as a result I'm

afraid I shall have to go over to Carlsbad again this summer."

"Then we must start early and get to London before the season's over," Dora insisted.

"And after your cure we can go to the Engadine again, can't we?" asked Theo. "I dote on Saint Moritz in August."

"There is the disadvantage of going to Europe," expounded Vivian, knitting Sartain into the conversation; "these flibbertigibbets of mine keep me jumping from Zeca to Mecca, as the Spaniards say. And I am getting too old to be trotted up and down the globe. I like to spend my summers tranquilly."

Sartain was able here to frame a sentence expressing his belief that Mr. Vivian was very fortunate in his travelling companions.

"There, Madams!" said Johnny. "You never pay us compliments like that."

"The fact is," said Adams, gravely, "a man must make his choice between Truth and Tact. He can't pretend to both. Now I have preferred Truth!"

The service was so silent and so swift that the guests never gave it a thought; and it was this simplicity of luxury that most impressed Sartain. He did not doubt that the silver and the glass and the linen were all expensive, but he had to admit that they were perfectly unpretentious. Everything was excellent in its kind, and nothing was showy enough to attract attention. As the turkey had followed the cutlets, and as it had been succeeded by a ham and a mayonnaise of celery and lettuce, Sartain felt that here was the quiet perfection of living. Wealth had its advantages, if it could lubricate the wheels of existence thus. The

young fellow had often longed for riches that he might do good with them; now, almost for the first time, he wished for wealth for his own sake, that he might have rooms comfortably furnished and meals artistically served. He projected his vision into the future, and imagined himself and Esther sitting at a table like this in an apartment like that. Then he remembered that it was Thanksgiving Day, and that in many a tenement-house of New York there were old men, worn women, and little children who had gone without food. The morsel in his own mouth choked him almost; and he felt for the moment as though the bountiful repast at which he sat had been stolen from the hungry.

After the salad there was a mince-pie; and that gave place to a mould of fancy ice-cream, representing a hen setting upon a nest of spun sugar. The talk of the twins, Johnny, and Adams sparkled along, but Sartain could not cast off the sombre shadow that had fallen over him. He was well aware that his taciturnity was out of place, but he could scarcely control it. During the last course he hardly spoke at all.

Finally Johnny rose, and the rest of them stood up also. Sartain saw Adams offer his arm to Theo while Dora took her father's, so he presented his to Johnny.

The men escorted the girls to the parlor, and then returned to the dining-room, whereupon Vivian invited Adams and Sartain to take the chairs next to him. The maid passed the coffee and the liqueurs.

For a minute or two nothing was said; and then Sartain broke the silence, finding it easier to master his melancholy when there were no women present.

"Do you suppose that Miss Dircks's grandmother is likely to die soon?" he asked.

"She is not likely to get well, I think," Vivian answered.

"Pretty well fixed, the old lady is, isn't she?" Adams queried.

"I have an impression that she has some money," the host responded. "How much there may be I cannot say. I hope that Esther will come in for a share of it."

"I guess even a little would be welcome in Stuyvesant Square," said the artist. "It's going to be a pretty cold winter for the engravers. Process is knocking them out, one after another. I don't wonder the old man has soured on the world. It's enough to make a saint swear, to work hard, to be one of the best men in the business, and then have the business go from under you, as his has done."

"Mr. Dircks is one of the finest engravers we have, isn't he?" asked Sartain; "one of the leaders of the American school?"

"His touch is exquisite," Adams asserted—"simply exquisite; and the more feeling there is in a drawing the better he does it. You wouldn't think that now, from the look of him, would you? He's a funny old bird, with that long white beard of his and those immense eyebrows. You'd never imagine he was daft about Wagner's operas either. He looks more like a benevolent revivalist who would lead in singing the 'Sweet By-and-By'—or else like a bunco-steerer, I don't know which."

"There is a marked contrast between his almost uncouth appearance," Vivian admitted, "and the delicacy of his artistic perceptions."

Suddenly it struck Sartain that it was odd he and Adams and Vivian should be dissecting Raphael Dircks thus coldly, when all three of them were in love with the old man's daughter.

"Did you know that Mr. Dircks had been in the army?" he inquired, desiring to divert the discussion.

"He was in the artillery," Vivian explained. "Curiously enough, he was in command of the very battery at Gettysburg I was ordered to support."

Sartain looked at Vivian in surprise. Here was the first time he had heard that his host had seen service in the war.

"We got fighting our battles over one day last winter," Vivian went on, "and I found that we had spent a good part of that very hot Fourth of July side by side. But I discovered also that there is something about his war record that he hates to recall. Have you remarked how he detests those in power and how he sympathizes with those in danger, whether they are really guilty or not? Well, sometimes I have surmised that perhaps he got into a mess of some sort; he is perfectly honest, of course, but he is as innocent as a babe, and he has a violent temper. Now he may have been unjustly accused and unable to clear himself; and that might imbitter him."

"You do not suppose that his daughter knows this?" Sartain asked, with the picture of Esther before him as she waited on her father that drizzling afternoon ten days before in Stuyvesant Square.

"I don't know it myself. I don't believe that there is anything really wrong with Dircks," Vivian returned; "but whatever it may be, his daughter doesn't suspect it."

"Of course, if the old man was cashiered or fired out of the army one way or another," said Adams, "it's no wonder he's got his mad up."

"I like the old man in spite of his peculiarities —or perhaps because of them, I don't know which," Vivian declared, "but I cannot pretend to understand him. He is a congeries of contradictions. That's what makes him so individual. But then, if we have eyes to see it, everybody is individual."

"I guess he's what you call a character, if that's what you mean," the artist admitted.

Sartain smiled and suggested that he himself had fancied Dircks would be "copy."

"Oh yes," Vivian returned, with a bitter sigh, "he is 'copy,' of course, and so are you, and so am I. That is the worst of our craft—everything is 'copy.' Nothing is sacred to a man of letters nowadays; he stands ready to find 'literary material' in his own wedding-day, or in his mother's death-bed. If we meet a beautiful woman, we are thinking how we can put her into words. If we make love to her, we do it with one finger on our own pulse, so that we can reproduce the effect in the next love-scene we compose. Sometimes I have wanted to liken a novelist's head to a kodak, in which he is incessantly storing away negatives to be developed at leisure. After a man has written a dozen novels he is incapable of anything but self-analysis. He is forever prying into his own motives and emotions. He takes his art with him everywhere; he cannot get away from it; it is his Old Man of the Sea; it is his Nemesis; it is the price he has to pay for the joy of creation."

Sartain confessed his own increasing tendency to keep himself under the microscope.

"It is a disgusting trick, is it not?" asked Vivian, in a gush of self-contempt. "I wish I could get back the power of doing things simply and for their own sake, and without the consciousness of the immense complexity of my motives for the most trifling act."

"As you say," Sartain commented, "this treating of all the sacred emotions merely as so much material for our art—that is the price we pay for the joy of creation. It's a high price, no doubt—but then is any price too high for the immense delight the craftsman feels as his work grows before him and he knows that it is good?"

"That's all very well," retorted the artist. "But sometimes he knows it is good when it isn't—when it's mighty bad, indeed. It isn't the men who do the best work that are most easily satisfied with what they do—not by a long shot, it isn't."

"Of course not," said the elder novelist, "and yet Sartain here is right in thinking that the man who does the best work gets the most enjoyment out of it. And this, even though he knows that he is far from attaining perfection. Don't you remember the anecdote of Thorwaldsen in his old age?"

"I don't care much for Thorwaldsen," the artist responded. "He was a neo-Greek—and that's a bastard style. Every fellow ought to begin where the fellow before him left off, and not go harking back after dead men's bones."

"With your gracious permission," the host retorted, laughing lightly, "I will tell you the anecdote as well as I can recall it. In Thorwaldsen's old age a friend entered his studio in Rome and found him seated despondently before the figure he had just finished mod-

elling. The friend asked him why he was sorrowful, and if it was because he had not been able to realize his ideal. The old sculptor answered that, on the contrary, he grieved because he had now, for the first time in his life, been able to realize his ideal; and he explained that in his youth he could never satisfy himself, and that he had always seen how imperfect even his best works were. Now, at last, his craftsmanship was equal to his conception; soon the cunning hand would surpass the failing brain, and therefore he perceived that he must be already on the verge of his decline."

"The old boy knew a thing or two, didn't he?" cried the artist, admiringly. "I didn't think it of him. I like the anecdote better than any of his other works."

When the three men went back to the drawing-room the twins crossed over to the piano.

"Now, Madams," cried Theo, "you must sing us something."

The artist joined them. "Have you heard Queenie Dougherty this year?" he asked.

"Who is Queenie Dougherty?" inquired Dora.

"Who are you, if you don't know who she is?" Adams retorted. "Queenie Dougherty is the Irish Empress. She is a great artist — and a pretty big woman too. She has a voice like the bulls of Bashan —but she is a singer from Sing Sing, and she gets all there is out of a song, I can tell you. Here's her latest." With that the artist sat at the piano and sang for them an ingenuously contrived lyric, the refrain of which was, "But he hadn't the price in his clothes!"

When he had made an end, amid their laughing

applause, Vivian said, "You must ask Sartain to sing you something. He used to be on the glee club, so he told me, and he must know all the college songs."

So they got out the book and Sartain sang. He had a mellow barytone, and he had profited by the teaching he had received in the glee club. They were surprised that he sang so well, and that his voice was so fine. They begged him to give them something else. He looked through a pile of music and he found the "Bedouin Song."

"Could you play the accompaniment of this?" he asked.

Johnny took her seat at the piano and Sartain stood behind her. The song suited his voice, and he knew it, and that helped him to sing it well. But when he came to the end—

> "Open the door of thy heart,
> And open thy chamber door,
> And my kisses shall teach thy lips
> The love that shall fade no more,
>
> "*Till the Sun grows cold,*
> *And the Stars are old,*
> *And the leaves of the Judgment Book unfold!*"

—then he knew that never hitherto had he sung it so well, for the face of Esther Dircks was before his eyes, and it was his yearning for her he was giving voice to, and his love that could never die.

Johnny did not look around when the song was over, nor did she join in the compliments of the others. She sat at the piano, with her back to him, saying nothing; but she softly played once and again the final notes of the air.

Sartain was much pleased with the unexpected impression he had produced. He resolved to take his leave at once before he spoiled it by another return of his shyness.

"That's very nice, that little *chansonette* of yours," said Adams.

"It was very well sung," Vivian declared, cordially—"with taste as well as feeling."

Then Sartain seized the opportunity, and said that he was glad they liked it, and that he had enjoyed himself very much, and that he must be going now. He shook hands with them all, and Johnny swung around on the piano-stool to say good-night. There was a queer expression on her face, he fancied, but he made no effort to guess what it was.

CHAPTER X

On the Saturday afternoon of the week after the Thanksgiving dinner, Sartain went again to the tall apartment-house facing Central Park. He wished to pay his digestion-visit promptly, but he wanted also to get the latest news from Esther Dircks. As it happened that day, there were half a dozen other callers; but he accomplished his double purpose, for as he said good-bye to one of the twins he managed to learn that Mr. Dircks had returned to New York, leaving his daughter at Madison, where her grandmother still lingered. He was told, also, that it might be several weeks before Esther would be back, for, although the old lady could not recover, she had an astonishing vitality.

He settled down to work on the new novel, and the manuscript of *A Wolf at the Door* began to expand rapidly. He wrote in his own little room for two or three hours every evening, and sometimes until after midnight; then, before going to bed, he went out for half an hour's brisk walk. The story opened before him most promisingly. The earlier chapters were devoted to the hero's brilliant oration at a club, which Sartain called the "Cosmos." Then came a supper at a fashionable lady's house after a theatre-party—and in the description of this repast he utilized certain of his impressions of the Thanksgiving dinner at

Vivian's. This late supper was intended to contrast picturesquely with a mid-day Sunday dinner in a cheap boarding-house—such a contrast as Balzac was wont to present so adroitly. The heroine was to be an idealized portrait of Esther; and he was quite willing that she should see herself in his pages some day and know that it was thus he saw her.

One afternoon, a few days before Christmas, he received a note from Adams, asking him if he were free to dine that evening. "No boiled shirt needed; come in your overalls," said a postscript. "'Go as you please' is my motto."

Sartain dashed off a line of acceptance. Generally he was slow in granting his friendship, and always he expected others to make the necessary advance to him. With Adams, however, he was ready to go half way towards an intimacy. Beneath the *bravura* manner of the artist, and under his bravado tone, and behind all his talking for effect, Sartain had detected the true man. He held that Adams had genuine simplicity and natural kindliness — qualities he greatly appreciated. He thought that the painter liked him, and he was still uncertain whether Vivian really did, or whether the elder novelist had not merely accepted him as one of a class, to all the members of which Vivian made a habit of being unfailingly courteous and considerate.

This doubt was lingering in his mind when Adams came for him that evening, a little before seven; and perhaps it lurked unformulated in some remarks to the artist in which he praised Vivian's good manners.

"Good manners?" Adams echoed. "You had better believe they are good. I used to think they were too good to be true."

"And you don't think so now?" asked Sartain.

"Now I know they are," the painter responded. "But they are not for external use only. Vivian makes a habit of attaching to him by bonds of gratitude for favors received all the rising young men of letters in the country. They tell me that he writes one of his clever little notes to every man who reviews one of his books—and if the fellow who did the notice is young, he takes it as a great compliment to himself and as a proof that his critical faculty is singularly acute."

"That seems to me to be—well—self-seeking," commented Sartain, "and quite unworthy of a man of Vivian's high rank as an author."

"No," Adams answered, "it isn't, really, for he's perfectly sincere always. He never says what he doesn't think. He praises these young fellows and lends them a leg up because he is really kindly. I've known him to take lots of trouble for a man who was dying—and I found that out only by accident. No, he likes to scatter benefits; it is perfectly natural for him to do a good turn to everybody. But I guess he knows that the exercise of these generous inclinations of his helps to keep him solid with the boys."

Sartain then ventured to express his own doubt as to whether he himself in Vivian's eyes was an individual or only a type.

"Oh, he likes you too," explained the artist. "I've heard him say so—and you can always rely on what he says. He thinks you are a curious specimen of an Easterner with a Western veneer, that's true; but he also loves you for yourself alone. At bottom, Vivian is a white man—as white as they make 'em, too. And

I guess he doesn't have any too good a time with those three red-headed daughters of his."

"Why, I thought they were the happiest family I had ever met!" cried Sartain.

"Well, there's always a cat and a dog in every Happy Family I've ever seen at the circus," Adams retorted. "And I guess they have cat-and-dog times at the Vivians' now and then. Those twins haven't got red hair for nothing, you know."

Sartain expressed his great surprise at this suggestion, as the girls had always seemed to him hearty and full of fun.

"Those are their company manners only," Adams returned. "They get quite morbid sometimes; and it's then they have their scraps. There's nothing like a real monkey-and-parrot row to clear the air and restore the moral tone."

"Is Miss Joan morbid also?" Sartain asked.

"Johnny's the best of them," the artist answered. "She's her father's daughter, she is. She's got a lot of the manly virtues, that girl. For one thing, she can be a stanch friend. She's the sort of woman a fellow could go to for comfort if he were in trouble. She is naturally very kindly, too. You know my definition of true politeness?"

Sartain had to admit that he did not know this.

"I call it mine," continued Adams, "but of course you will discover that it is really a plagiarism—true politeness is the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. Now that's the kind of politeness Johnny has in spite of all her masculine bad manners. She's a good fellow. And she knows how to house-keep, doesn't she? That was a fine dinner

we had on Thanksgiving—a good deal better than the dinner you're going to have to-night, I can tell you."

They had walked to Broadway in the beginning of the first snow-storm of the winter, and as they turned into Twenty-third Street, on their way to Sixth Avenue, the snow was coming down in thick flakes. The broad sidewalks were not yet emptied of the itinerant venders of cheap Christmas toys—poor fellows who stood along the curb-stone and swung their arms to keep warm if they could, and kept crying monotonously, "Ten cents each! Three for a quarter!" The great shops were still open, some of them, for the holiday season was at hand, and Christmas greens already decked a window here and there.

"Where are you taking me?" asked Sartain, as they neared Sixth Avenue, where the elevated trains were pounding overhead, each with its white feather trailing down over the shoulders of the locomotive.

"Just look at that!" cried the artist. "There's an arrangement in gray for you—that steam and this snow and the electric light! That's the kind of thing that makes New York a fount of joy to the man who can keep his eyes open."

"I suppose it *is* unlike what you see anywhere else," Sartain rejoined; "steam and electricity and an iron bridge miles long, and the traffic of a great city underneath. I wonder if Ruskin would not call it a vision of hell."

"Very likely he would," the painter answered promptly. "Ruskin would do anything; he even calls himself an art critic! But all the same, this is just the sort of thing the old yawper praised when Turner tried to paint it as 'Speed, Steam, and Storm.'"

The wind blew sharply down Sixth Avenue, and when they reached the other side they were swathed in snow shaken from the platforms of the elevated railroad. Soon they turned down one of the side streets, and Adams conducted his companion up the stoop of a little brick house, three or four doors from the corner. They pushed through the glazed door and passed before a high desk at which a handsome, white-haired lady was sitting.

"*Ah, Monsieur Adan,*" said she, smiling, "*il y a bien longtemps qu'on ne vous voit ici.*"

"*Ce soir je vous amène un nouveau client,*" Adams responded, indicating Sartain. "*Quel satané temps? N'est-ce pas?*"

With that they passed into the front room, the artist remarking to his companion, "I always swap a foreign phrase or two with the old lady. It goes further than tips to the head-waiter. I don't know her dago dialect, but in the parleyvoo vocabulary I can make out."

Sartain saw that this was like any of the other Italian restaurants he had been to in Boston. The head-waiter bustled up and welcomed Adams cordially, and ordered a subordinate to freshen up a table just vacated in one of the windows.

The two young fellows settled themselves at once, and the head-waiter brought them a bottle of claret. Then a slim Italian youth appeared with two plates of thin soup, and with a dish of grated cheese to be sprinkled into the watery compound in the vain hope of giving it a little more substance.

"They say this is called the Fried Cat, after a little restaurant in the Quarter," said Adams.

"THE HEAD-WAITER BROUGHT THEM A BOTTLE OF CLARET"

Sartain knew that by this was meant the Latin Quarter in Paris, and he thrilled that he was associating with an artist intimate enough with this famed region to contract its name thus familiarly. He did not wish to appear too ignorant of Parisian eating-houses, and so he spoke up. "I met a man in Topeka last winter who had been studying in Paris—at Julien's, I think—and he told me that the place he went to was called The Hole in the Wall."

"Never heard of it," the painter responded. "But the Fried Cat was a real place, and it got its name because whenever we ordered rabbit we always made them show us the cat's skin, for fear they might ring in rats on us. It didn't matter much what the ingredients were so long as the taste of it was all right. We were all pretty hard up those days—I was, for one. As the boys used to say, it's the devil to have a beer income and a champagne taste. And even here in New York it's policy to keep up your liking for Croton *extra sec.*"

This encouraged Sartain to ask Adams all about his life in Paris during the two years the painter had spent at the Beaux-Arts. This subject lasted them almost to the end of the dinner.

Then Adams looked around the two little rooms of the restaurant and said, "There are not many here to-night. There's Clarence Shields over there in the corner—and Jerry Quinn, too. You've heard of him?"

The young man who had been on a newspaper in Topeka for three years recognized these names at once.

"I suppose the thin one is Shields?" he inquired.

"No," was the answer, "the thin one is Jerry."

"That isn't his real name, is it?" Sartain asked. "I've read lots of his comic copy—and some of it is pretty good, especially the Irish dialect poems. That's how he came to take the name, I suppose."

"He took the name when he was baptized," the artist returned, "and he was christened Jerry, too, and not Jeremiah, and he isn't Irish at all, either. He's from Maine, I believe. Shields, now, is Irish."

"He's the one who looks like a parish priest?" was the new-comer's next question. "I should never have thought that so chunky a person could have written lyrics as airy as his."

While they were thus discussing the personal appearance of the men at the other table, Shields and Quinn made ready to depart. They had been sitting with their backs to Adams. Now they caught sight of him and came over.

"What's the good word with you?" asked the portly Shields, who wore a shabby black coat.

Adams introduced Sartain to Shields and to Quinn, telling them that the new-comer had been on a Western paper, and now had a job with Carington & Company. Then he ordered a fresh package of cigarettes, and suggested that they have their smoke out at his table.

Adams mentioned that Sartain was a friend of Mr. Vivian's, and said to Shields, "You don't go to Vivian's now, do you? And you used to."

"No," answered the poet, simply. "You see, I got drunk there one night by mistake."

Then he took the chair nearest to Sartain. "So it's with Carington you are?" he began, with more than a hint of a brogue in his pleasant and cultivated voice. "Do you know now if they've any departmental work

they want done there — any art criticism, for instance ?"

Sartain had to declare that he was afraid that the staff of Carington & Company was complete.

"Perhaps there's an opening on *Manhattan* now," Jerry Quinn broke in. He was a man of thirty, tall and thin. He had a hatchet face and a pronounced down-east accent. "I hear there's been another shake-up in the office. But *Manhattan* is really a wasted opportunity. I'm sure there's a big chance for a paper written by New-Yorkers for New-Yorkers. But nobody they've had on it yet has had any gumption. I don't know who's going to run it next, but I've heard they were cutting down their column rates to five dollars."

"I've a poem here the *Arctic Monthly* has declined," remarked Shields, taking a folded paper from the pocket of his shiny coat. "It's a month, or maybe two, now, since I laid eyes on *Manhattan*. Read that for me, Jerry, my boy, and see if you think it will do for them."

The down-easter took the manuscript and read it carefully, while the author helped himself to another cigarette.

"I shouldn't wonder if you could sell them that," Jerry Quinn declared, returning the sheet to the writer. "But these lines are all pretty long. Seems to me, if I was going to sell that poem where they pay space-rates, I'd cut every one of these lines in half and double up the price on them."

"It's a great big head you have, Jerry," cried the poet in admiration. "I'll copy it out in the morning, and if they take it, I'll have you to dinner here with me."

Jerry Quinn laughed. "Tell you what you ought to do, Clarry: you ought to retain me as your advance-agent, and give me a commission on all the contracts I put you up to."

"It's a steady desk on that same *Manhattan* I'd like," returned the poet. "And if they want copy, I'm the man for them, I'm thinking. I can write off-hand any part of the whole history of the world without looking at a book. I won't say that it will be absolutely accurate—of course not, nobody is absolutely accurate—but it will be near enough for a newspaper, anyway. What is accuracy, after all? Isn't it the only virtue of the Philistines?"

Adams intervened here. "What is a Philistine, after all?"

"A Philistine?" echoed Shields. "Well, now, I'm thinking that a Philistine is a man who calls me a Philistine."

There was a general laugh at this, in which Adams joined. Then he retorted: "That's not my definition. A Philistine is a man who gets the better of me in an argument."

Sartain came into the conversation. "A concrete example of the Philistine," he suggested, "is the man who believes that Bacon wrote 'Hamlet' and 'Othello!'"

"But I have always maintained Bacon was Shakespeare," cried Adams. "The bard led a double life, that's all."

"It's the letters of Junius, I believe, Bacon wrote," added Shields, falling into the joke.

"And of course Bacon was the Man in the Iron Mask," said Sartain, conscious of a sense of effort.

"And probably Bacon was the unknown who struck Billy Patterson," Adams added.

"How much do you suppose he struck him for?" asked Jerry.

"It's on the financial side of the transaction Jerry has his mind fixed always, I've noticed," Shields commented.

Sartain was quite aware that this conversation was a little forced, and that those who took part in it were straining. But none the less he liked it, and he liked to be in the company of men like Adams and Shields and Quinn.

The little group soon broke up; and Adams and Sartain tramped through the snow to Broadway together, where they separated. The young novelist thanked the artist for the pleasant evening he had had. He wanted to say that he felt as though he were making his first appearance in the New York circle which most closely corresponded to that in Paris celebrated by Henry Mürger; but he could not find quite the right words to phrase his thought, and he left it unsaid.

CHAPTER XI

THE new year brought no change to Sartain. He kept longing to see Esther Dircks again; he thought of her very often; he went on idealizing her as the heroine of his new novel. He had only to close his eyes and her image arose before him. So familiar was it to him that he was greatly surprised when one day it occurred to him that as yet he had spoken to the woman he loved only three times in all. It seemed to him as though he had loved her always. It was true also that neither at the Vivians' that first afternoon nor at the meeting of the Contemporary had he had a chance to talk to her alone; this precious opportunity had been vouchsafed to him only once. When he recalled their delicious interchange of confidences that Sunday twilight in Stuyvesant Square, he was impatient for her return to the city that he might attempt to renew this delight.

But it was six weeks that she remained away by the bedside of her grandmother, and during these two-score days and more Sartain went about his daily work as usual, and took his customary share of the pleasures of the town. His was a steady flame, but it was no devouring conflagration of the senses, no overwhelming passion. His love for Esther did not take away his appetite or keep him awake at night. His un-

conquerable resolve was to win her for his wife; she was the woman he wanted and meant to have if she would take him. But his devotion to her did not interfere with the regular routine of his existence.

At night he worked unceasingly on his new novel, which grew rapidly under his hands, and he did his work faithfully every day at the office; but he had discovered that the affairs of Carington & Company were not running smoothly. Salaries were still paid regularly, yet there were not lacking signs that the money to meet the weekly bills had been raised with difficulty. Sartain was still able to have sent to Dircks not a few of the small jobs of engraving that were absolutely needed. In thus aiding Esther's father it seemed to the young man almost as though he were bringing himself in some way closer to her—although, of course, he never expected her to know that he had had anything to do with her father's orders.

It was through the art-editor that he received the first news of Esther's probable return. A process-block had been sent to Mr. Dircks to retouch, with a request that he return it within the week. This was about the middle of January; and the next day the engraver had come in to tell the art-editor that he could not do the work within the required time, as he had to go West—having just received a telegram from his daughter announcing the death of her grandmother.

Sartain calculated that Dircks and his daughter would return early in the following week, and that they certainly would be back in Stuyvesant Square by the Sunday after. He determined to call then.

Yet when the day came he hesitated. He asked himself whether he was intimate enough with Esther

to intrude upon her within a fortnight after the death of her grandmother. He kept up the debate with himself for the five minutes it took him to walk from Irving Place to Stuyvesant Square; and the decision was given for the affirmative, not from any logical reason, but simply because the young man felt that he must see her again and as soon as possible.

It was the gruff voice of her father through the speaking-tube that bade him come up; and when he entered the front room where he had last seen her, almost two months earlier, he found only Raphael Dircks.

It was early in the afternoon, and the sun shone warmly although it was a bitter January day. In the clear light the bareness of the sitting-room was more obvious than it had been at his earlier visit. There was only a small square of worn carpet in the centre of the floor. There was only one small table. There were no ornaments, except on the mantel-piece three silver photograph-frames containing portraits of Mr. Vivian's daughters.

Her father stood with his back to the fireplace, where a small hard-coal fire glowed dully. His long frame, topped by his head with its full beard and its mass of straggling white hair, made the room appear smaller than it was. He held the Sunday supplement of the *Gotham Gazette* in his hand, and he had a corn-cob pipe in his mouth.

When he saw Sartain he laid aside the pipe and the paper, and greeted his visitor cordially, gripping the new-comer's hand in his own huge and hairy paw.

Sartain inquired at once about Esther. "Has not your daughter returned?" he asked, anxiously.

"Yes," was the sententious answer, as the old man took up his pipe, knocked out the ashes, and began to refill it from a pouch on the table.

"Isn't she well to-day?" was the young man's next question.

"Yes," responded her father, lighting the pipe with a match.

Sartain said nothing while Dircks puffed for a few seconds in silence. Generally, he was able to talk easily with her father, since the old man seemed to be glad to have some one else bear the burden of the conversation and express his thoughts for him. To-day the two monosyllabic responses chilled the young man's desire to talk, and left him with nothing to say.

Finally Mr. Dircks raised his slow, black eyes, and looked at Sartain from under his beetling brows.

"She's in there," the old man began, indicating the rear room by a movement of his broad shoulder. "She's lying down."

"I suppose she must be very much fatigued with the strain of the past weeks," said Sartain.

"She's tired," her father continued. "But she'll come in soon; meantime you read that," and he picked up the newspaper and held it out to his visitor with his big thumb spread over the paragraph he wished Sartain to peruse.

The young man skimmed the few lines of print with the speed of a practised newspaper reader. He recognized them as a quotation from an article in the *Arctic Monthly* of that month.

"Read it out," Dircks repeated when he caught Sartain's eye.

The young man remembered the poem Esther had been bidden to read aloud the last time he had called. He fancied now that the old man was a little slow of apprehension, and liked to absorb anything he approved by the ear as well as by the eye.

What Sartain read was this : "The good American is typified for us in the past by Washington and Franklin, by Emerson and Lincoln, men of simple tastes, all of them, accepting plain living that they might have high thinking. The bad American is with us in the present in the persons of the wrecker of railroads, the manipulator of trusts, and the briber of legislative committees—the man who is willing to make money anyhow, so long as he makes a great deal. It is for us to decide which type is to dominate our civilization in the future. Our present aristocracy of wealth has neither breeding nor common-sense nor patriotism. It has vanity without pride. It is ostentatious and vulgar and trivial. It is snobbish to a degree unknown in the older countries from which it has borrowed its outworn idols. Any one who has read the newspapers for the last ten years can name more than one rich man, and more than one rich man's son, who has been sowing dragon's teeth, sure to spring up armed men in due season. The career of these men of great wealth is a direct incentive to riot and rapine, to nihilism and to anarchy."

When Sartain had finished reading, he looked up at Dircks, and for the first time he remarked the extreme whiteness of the whites of the old man's eyes.

"That's good!" Dircks declared. "I ain't more notional than any other man, but I know what's right and what's wrong. And it ain't right for one man to

have money to waste when another man hasn't any to pay for food!"

"It is not easy to say just how we should control the distribution of wealth," Sartain returned. "But what most annoys me is the foolish way in which so many of these rich men's sons waste their inheritance. I should think they would like to have some fun with their money—buying books and pictures and statuary, or building public fountains, or making parks for the poor people. There's one of them now has a paper, called *Manhattan,* and he doesn't know what to do with it. I think there's an idea in it—a New York weekly, just for New-Yorkers, ought to succeed."

"You would like to edit a paper?" asked Dircks, with another lowering of his eyebrows, as he gazed intently at Sartain.

"I don't know that I should make a good editor," said the young man, modestly. "But I should dearly love to try my hand at it. And I believe that there is really an opening now for a paper like *Manhattan,* but the young dude who has been paying the bills will tire of it sooner or later, and then sell it or stop it."

"If he'd been losing on it he'd sell it cheap," was Dircks's only comment.

Sartain wondered if Esther in the next room could hear what they had been saying, if she had recognized his voice, if that was why she did not come in, and if she would think his visit that afternoon an unpardonable assumption.

As though her father had read his thoughts, Dircks turned heavily in his chair and called to her. "Esther!"

"Yes, father," was the response; and it was with a

thrill of pleasure that the young man heard her voice again.

"Here's Mr. Sartain come to visit with you!" the old man said.

"Oh!" she cried. "Well—tell him I'll be there in a minute."

But it was nearly five minutes before she kept her word. And when the door opened at last and she came gliding in, he was shocked to see how worn she was and how thin. In her simple black dress she was paler than ever, and slighter. The sunlight glinted from the ashen gold of her hair, and she appeared to Sartain more ethereal than before, more like some rare orchid, disdainful of any connection with the soil.

His heart leaped within him as his hand touched hers. He wished that he could fold her in his arms and bid her lie there, secure and protected. What he said was that he hoped she had not overfatigued herself. She answered that she had been very tired, but that she had been resting the two days since she came home. Sartain had no liking for the details of disease and death; but he felt the need of breaking the silence, and he asked when her grandmother had died — on what day?

She told him; and then she went on to tell him all about her grandmother's last hours, and how the old lady was very fond of her and very good to her. In telling him all these things, she broke down once or twice, and wept a little; and then he would beg her not to continue, if it was painful to her; and she would insist, informing him that it was a relief to talk about her grandmother, who was so kind and sweet. She confided to him that, much as she should miss the old

lady, she could not wish her alive again, since it would only prolong her suffering fruitlessly. And then she declared that this seemed to her so heartless that she could not forgive herself for holding such an opinion.

He informed her that he understood exactly what she meant and how she felt; and he tried to encourage her and to make her believe that she had done her duty fully. He assured her that her presence must have been a great comfort to the old lady; and she confessed that this was so, since her grandmother did not want her out of sight towards the end, and had followed her about the room with her eyes after she had lost the power of speech. Then he begged her to believe that it would be a satisfaction to her always to remember that she had been present during her grandmother's last hours, and that she had done all she could to comfort and sustain the dying woman. She admitted that this was true enough, but still she reproached herself for her thought.

He assured her that this was merely morbid, and that she should throw off such strained fancies. Her first duty now, so he continued, was to herself—and to her father, of course. She must rest and regain her strength. She ought to take very good care of herself during the remainder of the winter, as the climate of New York was so treacherous. Especially ought she to take life easily until she had wholly recovered her former health and vigor; she should be very careful not to overtask herself.

Then she told him how good Johnny had been in agreeing to do her reading for her at Bellevue Hospital.

"I did not know you went to Bellevue?" he declared.

"Oh yes," she answered, "Dora and Theo and I belong to a Ten—a Ten of the King's Daughters, you know. And we promised this fall to go to Bellevue two afternoons a week to read to the convalescents. And while I've been away Johnny has taken my turn, and she isn't a King's Daughter either. She wouldn't join when we did."

"I wonder why not?" Sartain commented.

"I'm sure I don't know," Esther answered. "Perhaps she knew she was good enough without belonging to anything. She is really good, you know. I'm devoted to Dora and Theo, but they are not half as good as Johnny is."

This was entirely a new suggestion to Sartain, who had not hitherto looked on Mr. Vivian's eldest daughter as the embodiment of goodness.

By this time twilight was descending on the city, and Mr. Dircks, rousing himself from his revery, struck a match on his trousers and lighted the gas. Then Sartain rose to his feet at once, apologized for staying so long, and was assured that it did not seem a quarter of an hour since he came.

As he was going Esther invited him to come again on Sunday afternoon, because even if she were not at home her father would be glad of a chat with him.

At the head of the stairs Dircks himself called down, "That paper now—what's its name?"

"What paper?" asked Sartain, surprised.

"The paper about New York," was the old man's reply. "The one the fool's losing money on?"

"Oh," the young man answered, "you mean *Manhattan?*"

"That's it," Dircks repeated, "*Manhattan.* I must remember the name."

When Sartain got out into the street and began to walk briskly up Lover's Lane, he went over again in his mind the whole conversation with Esther Dircks; and he was astonished to discover that she had received him at once on a friendly footing. It was only the fourth time he and she had exchanged words, and it seemed to him that in this fourth meeting he had made a great stride towards intimacy. The first time he had gone to the house in Stuyvesant Square, that drizzling afternoon in November, he had been a mere casual acquaintance making a first call. On this second visit he had been accepted at once as though he were a familiar friend. That he should have made this progress was to him inexplicable, since he and she had not spoken or corresponded in the two months' interval between the two interviews.

CHAPTER XII

During the next month, as it chanced, Sartain was able to see Esther only twice—once again at the house in Stuyvesant Square on a Sunday afternoon, and once at the Vivians' on the Saturday following. He went to the novelist's two or three times without finding her there. Even on the two occasions when he did get speech with her, the conversation was unsatisfactory in so much as they were not alone. At Mr. Vivian's there were a couple of slim young men talking to the twins; and this was perhaps the reason that Johnny kept her place by the side of Esther, thus forcing Sartain to talk to both of them at the same time, which was a strain on his shyness. On the Sunday afternoon when he called at Stuyvesant Square he found Johnny there, who had come to discuss a proposed change in the hours when they were to read at Bellevue, and who remained as long as he did.

In other ways, also, January and February were months of doubt. The affairs of Carington & Company were becoming more and more involved, and there were not wanting signs of impending failure.

In the meantime he took advantage of the respite time allowed him and toiled away on *A Wolf at the Door*. The manuscript grew steadily under his pen; and although he felt the pressure of the book—the

dead weight every novelist has to carry, the insistence of a single idea—he worked on without hasting and without resting. Towards the end of February he was able to look forward to the time when he could send *A Wolf at the Door* either to the *Metropolis* or to the *Arctic*, he had not yet decided which.

In the last week of February he met Esther Dircks again; but once more he was able to talk to her alone only for a few minutes. It was at an exhibition of paintings held at one of the galleries on Fifth Avenue. Adams had sent Sartain a card for the private view, which took place on the afternoon of the last Saturday of the month.

As he was free early on Saturdays, Sartain was one of the first visitors to arrive. He found that each of four artists had grouped from six to ten of his paintings in his own corner of the gallery. He went at once to Adams's pictures, and he found that the chief of them was a "Cinderella," elaborated from the swift pencil sketch he had seen that first afternoon in New York when he had made Esther's acquaintance. Neither she nor the twins had posed for it since, but Adams had utilized professional models in the positions assumed by the three girls on the table at Mr. Vivian's. The likeness of either of the twins had been lost in the actual painting; that of Esther had been preserved, and the artist had been most successful in catching the grace of her attitude and in suggesting the charm of her manner. What Sartain most liked about the picture was its uncompromising modernity. Here was the heroine of the old fairy-tale, and she was a New York girl of the nineteenth century; yet somehow while you were under the spell of the paint-

er's art you accepted this, and even thought that this was exactly what she ought to be. There was breadth in the handling, and a bold simplicity that Sartain enjoyed. Adams could paint—that nobody could deny. Sartain wondered whether or not Esther would see how the painter's affection for her was written large upon the picture. Sartain could see this plainly enough —could she?

When Adams arrived, Sartain congratulated him.

"I'm glad you like it," the painter responded. "I think it's the swellest thing I've done. The composition wasn't easy, either; and I had dead loads of trouble working out the color-scheme."

Surprised that the artist saw only the technical merits of his own work, the literary man asked him if he were not also pleased that the character of his picture was very modern, and that its sentiment never slopped over into sentimentality.

"Yes, that's so, too," Adams explained; "but then I can't help that, and, in a sense, I don't deserve any credit for it. That modern note you like is the one I must strike; I couldn't strike any other if I tried. I was born so. And I'm glad you don't think that picture is sentimental—but I couldn't help it if it was. You see, it is just this way—how I see things and how much sentiment I put into a picture, that's something I have little or nothing to do with; that's something decided for me once for all at my birth; no effort would ever make me any different. So long as I do my best always you will like my modern point of view, and you will think that my sentiment is all right. Other fellows won't like what I do, if they dislike modern life and if they like sentimentality. I've in-

herited certain gifts, certain ways of looking at life; and so I see things in a certain way, because that's the only way I can see them. Another man would have to paint them in another way. But where I am responsible is in my technic—that isn't a gift; that doesn't come by inheritance; that's the result of hard work, and of taking thought, and of putting my back into it, and of doing my best always, and of never being satisfied."

"But I thought you were satisfied with 'Cinderella' here," Sartain retorted.

"Not a bit of it," the artist rejoined, promptly. "It's the best thing I've ever done, I think, and I guess I can see its merits now as clearly as anybody else ever will. But satisfied with it? Not much. Why, I'd like to be able to build a studio just to paint that picture in, and to have the models I want, and to be free to take all the time I need, and then—"

"And then you would be satisfied?" asked Sartain, smiling.

"And then I should probably not be any better pleased with it than I am now," Adams confessed, rumpling his hair with a familiar gesture that increased the quizzical expression on his face.

The number of visitors in the gallery was slowly increasing. While the two young men were standing before Adams's picture a group of girls entered and gazed about. One of them, catching sight of the "Cinderella," detached herself and came towards the corner where the young men were. When she saw them, she hesitated for a moment and then pressed forward again.

"There's no need of your wasting any more time

looking at these things of mine," said Adams, lounging away at last.

When his eyes fell upon the young lady, now not two yards from him, he sprang forward. "Why, Miss Esther!" he cried, and Sartain turned instantly.

"I thought that was a face I'd seen before," she said, holding out her hand.

"I guess you might have seen it behind — since talking to you always turns my head," the artist rejoined.

"And Mr. Sartain, too!" the girl went on, shaking hands with him also. "I'm sorry father isn't going to be here this afternoon. I'm sure he would have liked to hear what you say about all these pictures. He thinks so much of your opinion, Mr. Sartain."

The young man wanted to say that he would rejoice if her father's daughter also held him in high esteem, but his shyness seized him, and all that he could do was to mumble, "Does he? I didn't know it."

Sartain for the first time saw a woman whose portrait had been painted, standing before her counterfeit presentment. He wished that he could turn a pretty phrase on the superiority of nature over art; but he felt that, even if he found the fit words, he would never be able to utter them. Still more did he wish that Adams were not there. Before the painter, whom he knew to be both a rival and a confident talker, he was ill at ease and impatient. He had often ascribed shyness to conceit; and he now wondered whether he was really as conceited as his extreme shyness seemed to indicate.

He stood silent by her side, while Adams rattled along, making her laugh with the first remark; and

he heard her declare that she had come with the three Vivian girls, and that she had best try to get them out of the gallery before Dora and Theo could see how he had represented the Haughty Sisters. She indicated the corner of the hall where the twins and Johnny were, but he showed no inclination to leave her. Then, almost arbitrarily, so it seemed to Sartain, she insisted on Adams's going to the Vivians. Rather reluctantly the artist obeyed her; and Sartain found that he and Esther were left alone together in the thickening crowd of visitors.

"You say your father is not to be here this afternoon," he began. "I hope that he is not ill?"

"Oh no," she answered. "He is quite well, thank you. But he is very busy just now."

Sartain was glad to hear this, and he thought that probably some of the orders on which Dircks was engaged were the result of his own influence upon the art-editor of Carington & Company. He wished that Esther knew what he had done for her father, little as it was; but, of course, he could not tell her.

"The days are so short now," he said, "I suppose your father begrudges every hour of light he gives to anything but engraving."

"Oh, he isn't working on a block to-day," the girl answered, raising her liquid eyes. "It's business that keeps him busy now. Father has to see the lawyers, you know, and have papers signed, and all that sort of thing. They wouldn't even let him go to the opera this afternoon, and I know he hated to miss the 'Meistersinger.'"

"Lawyers?" Sartain repeated, puzzled. "Is he in trouble at all?"

She laughed the merry little laugh he always found so fascinating.

"Why, don't you know?" she asked. "My grandmother left us a little money. And that's trouble enough, goodness knows. Father hasn't been able to do any of his own work for a week or more."

The young man told her that he did not know of her good fortune, and he congratulated her cordially. But his own heart sank for a second at the thought that here was another obstacle to his suit, since, if she had wealth, he would have no right to ask her to share his poverty. Then his common-sense came to his rescue, and he confessed the absurdity of these romantic scruples. If she had money, so much the better for her—and for both of them, were she willing ever to marry him. So long as there was no gross inequality of fortune, the better off either of them might be the easier their married life would be.

"Oh, the money isn't mine," she said, in response to his congratulations. "It's all father's now. Why, I'm not twenty-one for a year yet; and it seems ever so long before I'm to have any of it. I don't know anything about business, either; and father has to do it all for me."

He asked if Mr. Dircks would give up wood-engraving and devote himself to the care of their inheritance.

"Oh dear, no," she answered, with another cheery little laugh. "It isn't so much as all that. Why, my grandmother wasn't really rich — not what they call rich here in New York—and then I've lots of cousins out there. You mustn't think we are going to roll in wealth. Nobody will want to marry me for my money.

I'm not an heiress, like Johnny." Then she paused, and a slight blush mantled her cheek as she added, "You know that Johnny and Theo and Dora have lots and lots of money?"

Before he could make any reply to this the Vivians and Adams joined them. The three girls shook hands with Sartain cordially. Johnny was rather more manly in her attire than usual, and as a result she was not so attractive in Sartain's eyes. The twins laid hold of Esther; and in the readjustment of relative positions, Sartain found himself standing by Johnny, a little outside of the group which centred about Adams.

Of the four girls, it was with Johnny that Sartain was under least constraint, since his love for Esther sometimes struck him dumb in her presence. Johnny was a good fellow—Adams was right in saying that. She was friendly and sympathetic. Sartain found no difficulty in talking to her; and it did not strike him at first that this was due to her tact. He liked her, and he wished that he had such an elder sister to whom he could go for counsel and for comfort. Before he was aware of it, he found that he and Johnny were standing together in front of the "Cinderella," and that he could not then leave her alone without obvious rudeness.

Johnny had been studying the picture again, and now she turned to the young man by her side. "It is well done, isn't it?" she asked. "Papa is right in declaring that Madams knows how to put paint on canvas as well as anybody in America."

"Yes," Sartain responded, "it is well painted. Of course, I know little about such things, but the technic seems to me masterly. And there's a heart behind the brush-work."

"You wouldn't suspect it, if you only heard him talk," said Johnny; "would you?"

"You can't help admitting it," he answered, "if you note how he has brought out the immaterial beauty of Cinderella—how he has seized the spirituality of Miss Dircks's face."

"He has been studying Esther's face for a long while," she retorted; "it's no wonder he has it by heart now."

"It isn't merely that it is done lovingly," Sartain returned, "it's the subtle skill with which he seems to have suggested the soul beneath."

Johnny gave a little laugh, not mocking, exactly, although there was a hint of hardness in it. "You couldn't speak more enthusiastically about her," she said, "if you were in love with her, as Madams is."

Sartain never knew what sudden impulse possessed him and made him surrender his secret.

"And supposing I was," he asked, "do you think I should have any right to hope?"

For a few seconds the healthy color in Johnny's cheek paled, but she made no immediate reply. She only gave him a curious look—a look which he did not understand at all.

"If I were in love with her," persisted he, "do you think I should have a chance?"

"How should I know what another girl is likely to do?" Johnny asked in return.

"But you know *her*," he urged; "she went to school with your sisters, and you know all about her."

"Yes," said Johnny, calmly. "I know all about her."

"Then you will tell me all you know, won't you?"

he went on. "And you will be patient with me, won't you? I must have somebody I can talk to about her, and you are the only one. You will let me, won't you? It's selfish, of course, for me to want to bother you with my love for her; I know it is, and I beg your pardon now for obtruding it upon you. I can't guess why I told you; I had no intention of doing it, I assure you. It slipped out before I knew it. But now I have told you, now you do know, you will listen to me, won't you, Miss Johnny?"

"I am listening," she said.

"You will let me talk to you about her," he pursued. "You will tell me all you know of her and of her ways? It would be so kind of you, if you would! If there was anything I could do for you in return, I'd do it—but, of course, I know there isn't, for you have everything you want. But if there was anything at all, I'd do it gladly."

To this strange avowal, made in a low voice, in the corner of a crowded picture-gallery, Johnny had listened without a gesture. Probably any one who had seen the young man pleading with the tall, handsome girl, and who had overheard the eagerness in his voice, might have thought that it was she he loved, and that he was proposing to her then.

At last she raised her head and looked at him. "You do love her!" she said, slowly. "There's no doubt of that!"

"You can't guess how much I love her!" Sartain answered.

Johnny made no reply.

"Of course, I don't hope to have her love me now, not even a little," he continued. "She scarcely knows

me, after all. And what am I that she should love me, anyhow? I haven't anything to offer her—nothing but the love I have for her. What I want you to tell me is this: do you think that Adams has a chance now? Has she changed her mind since she rejected him last? And—and is there anybody else that I don't know? You see, I love her so much, she seems so beautiful to me—so exquisite, so perfect—that I don't see how it is everybody else isn't in love with her, too."

Johnny answered him gravely. "I don't know whether Adams has a better chance now than he had last summer. I haven't an idea. Esther may have come to like him better than she did then—but I can't tell you."

"I must run the risk of that," sighed Sartain; "and Adams isn't a rival to be sneered at. He can paint her, too, and I can't do anything. But—but is there anybody else in love with her—anybody I don't know?"

"I think not," declared Johnny—"at least, I have not heard of anybody else, and I have seen nothing to make me think that Esther has any more admirers." Then she checked herself and laughed again. "Surely she has her full share with Madams and with you, hasn't she? I never saw two more devoted lovers. I don't see why you should both choose me for a confidant."

"Has Adams talked to you about her, too?" asked Sartain.

"Yes," she answered. "When Madams and I happen to be together, he never talks of anything but Esther. Now you are following his example. Perhaps it is lucky for me that there are not more of the men

I know in love with her. Strange as it may seem to you, I fear I might find a certain monotony in having another woman's perfection as the sole topic of conversation."

By this time the twins had made the circuit of the gallery with Esther and Adams, and the merry group was coming back to Johnny and Sartain, augmented by Mr. Vivian and by a sprightly young woman.

As Vivian was shaking hands with Sartain, the latter heard the sprightly young woman thank the twins for all the information they had given her.

Then the twins turned to Johnny.

"You can't guess who that is?" said Dora.

"We've been interviewed!" Theo explained.

"Was that a reporter?" Johnny asked, with a languid interest. "What did she want?"

"She wanted to know who Esther was," Theo answered. "She'd recognized her as the original Cinderella."

"But she said she'd no idea that we were the Haughty Sisters," Dora broke in. "So Madams has failed to disgrace us in the eyes of the public."

"How did you come to tell her anything?" Johnny inquired. "I didn't know we had any lady journalists on our visiting-list."

"She had met papa," Dora answered.

"At least, she claimed she had," Theo added; "and you know papa—he was too polite to deny it."

"She said that she had been up to interview me once," Mr. Vivian admitted. "That is very likely."

"She was an engaging young thing, I thought," commented the painter. "I'd like to do her in water-colors."

"Do you think she is one of those whose color will wash off?" asked Johnny.

"Come now," Adams returned, "don't be hard on a poor girl who has to earn her living the best way she can. You've no right to be down on her because she isn't as wealthy as you are. Now, I don't care for money myself; what I want is brains."

"What you want is brains?" repeated Johnny, mockingly. "Exactly!"

"I don't see—" Adams began.

But Johnny interrupted him. "You don't see? Of course you don't. You are as blind as a bat, even about your own interests. When a thing is going on right under your eyes, you never see it!"

Sartain heard with surprise the acerbity with which Johnny spoke. Hitherto when she and Adams had fenced there had been buttons on the foils, but this time it seemed as though the girl preferred the unguarded small-sword and wanted to wound. Apparently the painter was conscious of this, for he refused to retort.

After a brief general conversation about the pictures, the party broke up. The three Vivians took Esther home with them in their carriage, as Saturday was their day for receiving.

When they had driven off, Mr. Vivian walked down Fifth Avenue with the two young men till he came to one of his clubs, and there he left them.

Just as they were going on again the elder novelist called them back.

"By-the-way, Sartain," he said, "can you come and see me to-morrow about four o'clock? Mr. Dircks will be there then, and he has a little scheme he desires me to propose to you."

"Certainly," the young man answered, much astonished. "At four to-morrow? I shall be delighted to come."

As the young men paced along down Fifth Avenue, Sartain hardly heard what Adams was saying, as he was trying to puzzle out why Mr. Dircks could possibly want to see him. Just before they came to the corner of Thirty-fourth Street, he made up his mind that it was hopeless for him to try and guess. He had only twenty-four hours to wait, and then he would hear what this scheme was. He turned his attention back to his companion in time to hear the painter ask, "What was the matter with Johnny, anyway? Did you notice how she jumped on me that time, just before we came out?"

Sartain admitted that he had observed it.

"I don't know what got into her," Adams admitted. "Generally when we have our little scraps, she never hits below the belt, but just now she got in two or three foul blows. She couldn't have been savager if she'd been crossed in love!"

CHAPTER XIII

A DOZEN times within the next twenty-four hours did Sartain ask himself why he had made a confidant of Mr. Vivian's eldest daughter. He regretted that he had let her or any one have a glimpse of his deeper feelings. He trusted Johnny; he knew he could rely on her loyalty, he was sure she would keep his secret. Yet there was a something in the way she had received his confidence that puzzled him. Perhaps it was no more than a change of attitude on her part towards a man who, as she was now aware, loved another woman. Sartain pretended to no expertness in feminine psychology; indeed, he often felt how his growth as a writer of fiction was cramped by his ignorance of women.

In the morning, when he began to turn over the thirty or forty pages which composed the regular Sunday edition of the *Daily Dial*, he saw an outline of Adams's "Cinderella," and below this he beheld a scrambling sketch of three girls standing on a table in poses copied from those in the picture. As he read the head-lines of the accompanying article his face flamed, and the wish sprang up hot in his heart to go down to the office of the *Daily Dial*, and to cowhide the brute who was responsible for the insertion of the offending matter. At the end he found the sig-

nature, "Polly Perkins," and he assumed at once that the vulgar stuff had been composed by the sprightly young woman they had met at the gallery the afternoon before.

There is no need to analyze the article which thus annoyed Sartain, as a selection from the scare-heads that introduced it will be sufficient to display its quality: "High Jinks on the Top Floor;" "Lovely Ladies as Artists' Models;" "Literature and Art;" "Dainty Little Esther Dircks as Cinderella;" "Novelist Vivian's Vivacious Daughters as the Haughty Sisters;" "Pretty Girls Pose on Parlor Tables." Never before had the vulgarity of this kind of journalism revolted him as it did now, when he beheld the woman he loved thus exposed to the public gaze. Yet there was no redress. Plainly enough the article was not libellous; it revealed no animus on the part of the writer; it made no statement absolutely false; only it was leering and sneering and coarse. Sartain read it a second time carefully, to come to the conclusion that the girl who wrote it was now so used to the concoction of such stuff that she was no longer aware of its offensiveness.

This was what he suggested to Mr. Vivian when he kept his appointment with the novelist that afternoon.

"Very likely Polly Perkins thought that she was giving three other girls a good notice," Vivian declared, as he conducted his visitor through the narrow corridor towards his own library. "The dyer's hand, you remember—subdued to what it works in!"

"It's disgusting!" cried Sartain, shaking himself.

"It is pitiful," Vivian admitted. "Some of these Sunday papers here make me understand the saying of

Carmen Sylva—you remember?—that if Gutenberg could have foreseen modern journalism he would have destroyed his invention."

"I wonder who can want to read a thing of that sort?" Sartain exclaimed.

"You and I did read it," Vivian answered. "But I will say for myself that I happened to see it at the club. I do not allow the *Dial* in the house now. And therefore I must request you not to mention the article to the girls; there is no need that their minds should be contaminated." They had now come to the door of the library. Mr. Vivian threw it open, saying, "You will find Mr. Dircks waiting for you."

Sartain blinked in the sudden glare of the winter sunshine, and then he recognized Mr. Dircks seated almost in the centre of the bow-window. The large form of the old man filled the comfortable arm-chair. His white hair was longer than usual, and fell on the collar of his dark-gray coat. His grizzled beard spread out on his chest and gave him a patriarchal appearance, the benignancy of which was contradicted only by the bristling eyebrows.

"I have asked Sartain to come here this afternoon," Vivian began, "at your request, Mr. Dircks. He knows that you wish to make him a proposition."

Sartain turned his gaze from Vivian to Dircks. The old man moved uneasily in his chair, and he made a vague murmur to Sartain. Turning to his host, he said, "You tell him," and then he settled himself once more in his seat, with his gaze fixed on the young man. It was then that Sartain discovered for the first time that Esther had her father's eyes.

"I do not think that I can state the case for you as

well as you could yourself," Mr. Vivian responded. "But I will attempt the task, if you desire."

Sartain remarked how clear was Vivian's speech, and how distinct was his enunciation. His delivery was like his handwriting; both were the result of a belief that nothing is so insignificant that it may be neglected.

"You tell him," repeated Dircks.

"Very well, then, since you insist," said Vivian. "I will be as brief as may be. Here is the matter in a nutshell: Mr. Dircks is about to purchase *Manhattan*, and he wishes to know if you are free to accept the position of editor?"

The young man was taken wholly by surprise. "Yes," he answered, at last. "Yes, I think that Carington & Company would release me—in fact, the work is so far advanced now that they can finish it in the office."

"Then you are willing to edit *Manhattan*, if Mr. Dircks buys the paper?" Vivian asked.

Sartain instantly thought of Esther and of the intimacy likely to thicken between him and her father if he joined the staff of a paper Mr. Dircks owned.

"Oh, certainly," he answered; "certainly, I shall be very glad to help. Who is to be the editor-in-chief?"

"You are," Vivian responded.

"I?" cried Sartain, in great surprise. "Oh, I didn't suppose you meant that!"

"Mr. Dircks approves of the views he has heard you expound in regard to the proper management of a weekly review to be written by New-Yorkers for New-Yorkers," said the host, "and he wishes to provide you with an opportunity to convert your theories into practice."

Sartain looked at Dircks, whose eyes had been upon him since he entered the room.

"By New-Yorkers for New-Yorkers?" the young man repeated. "Doesn't that let me out? I'm either a Rhode-Islander or a Kansan, I suppose."

"You have been here now for four months—is it not?" Vivian asked. "That is quite time enough to make a New-Yorker out of a Kansan Rhode-Islander. When you have lived here longer you will know that all New-Yorkers have come from somewhere else. The New-Yorkers who were born in New York have either gone West to earn their living, or else they have gone to Europe to live on their incomes."

"But do you think that I know enough about New York to edit a paper intended specially for New-Yorkers?" objected Sartain.

"You know more about it than you did last year," Vivian responded. "And you thought you knew enough then to attempt a novel of New York life, did you not?"

Sartain admitted, with a little constraint, that he supposed he was better acquainted with New York now than he was when he started in to write *Dust and Ashes*.

"The confession of ignorance is the beginning of knowledge," declared Vivian, smiling at his own sententiousness. "Did I ever tell you what Pius IX. used to say to the foreigners who were presented to him?"

"You never did," the young man responded, eagerly; "and I have been meaning to ask you."

"Pius IX. was a very shrewd old man," Vivian continued, "and when he asked the visitor, 'How long have you been in Rome?' if the answer was 'a fort-

night' or 'a month,' the Pope would say, 'I suppose you have now seen nearly everything.' If the visitor replied that he had been in Rome a year, then Pius would respond, 'I suppose you are beginning to find your way about the city.' But if the visitor declared that he had been there two or three years, then the Pope would smile and say, 'I suppose you have discovered by this time that you never will see the half of the things Rome has to show.'"

Sartain laughed with appreciation of this, and confessed at once that he saw the personal application of the anecdote.

"When you came to me from the West four months ago," the host returned, "and sat in that chair and told me about the novel of New York life you have been writing out there in Kansas, on the strength of a chance visit or two to the city, I thought that you were like the Pope's visitor who had been in Rome a few days only. Now I am inclined to think that you have been promoted to the more advanced class; but it is only when you have lived here, as I have, for forty years, that you will discover the hopelessness of trying to know the whole city—the Five Points as well as Fifth Avenue, Little Italy as well as Wall Street."

"New York is headquarters!" broke in Dircks, speaking for the first time since the conversation began. "That's why I want a paper here to talk right out in meeting."

This brought the discussion back to its starting-point. "Here is the situation," Vivian explained, beginning again: "Mr. Dircks proposes to buy *Manhattan*, if you will edit it. He is a reformer, as you are. You and he think alike on certain of the important ques-

tions of the day. You both believe that society can be improved immediately by legislation—"

"Don't you?" interrupted the young man.

"I do and I do not," answered the elder. "A law far in advance of public opinion on any subject is likely to do more harm than good. If you want your ideas to prevail, you must first educate public opinion, stimulate it in every way; and as soon as the majority feels about the question as you do, the victory is won, and mere legislation is easy, for all that is needed then is to codify public opinion. If Mr. Dircks wishes to shift the burdens of the worthy poor upon the shoulders of the idle rich, the advocacy of special remedies like the single-tax or the income-tax or the inheritance-tax, or all of them, will not be so efficacious as the creation of a sentiment abroad among the people that gross inequalities of wealth are wrong in themselves and dangerous to the republic. When the existence of the evil is generally admitted, it will be simple enough to apply a remedy."

"That's it," Dircks broke in again; "it's the men out of work and wanting work, while the trusts are shutting down—that's what we've got to show up."

Sartain thought it best to file an objection here. "Of course, there are lots of evils to be attacked; but do you think that a merely aggressive paper is likely to do as much good as one that can praise as well as find fault? It has always seemed to me that the way to make the world better is to tell people it is getting better, and to prove it to them; to encourage them and not to discourage them; to inspire hope and confidence and energy to fight a good fight, with a certain victory in the distance."

"What is most to be avoided," responded Vivian, "is the tone of contempt which marks so much of the aggressive writing of our time. Hatred may be a force, perhaps, but certainly contempt is not. That is the weakness of a paper as brilliant as the *Wall Street Standard*—Gillingham cannot help expressing his contempt for everybody who is not as clever as he is."

"I told him what I thought of him," said Dircks, emphatically. "I wouldn't trust him as far as I could sling a bull by the tail."

"Then what Mr. Dircks really wants is a hopeful paper, which shall point out how certain abuses stand in the way of progress," Sartain suggested. "*Manhattan* is to take advanced ground on all matters of reform, but it is not to be a shrieking protest against the present order of society. It ought to be a non-partisan, I should say—not neutral, but bound to no party, ready to take sides on any question according to the principle of the thing, and not influenced by the effect of the proposal upon the fortunes of any political organization."

"That's it," Dircks confirmed, "not wearing anybody's uniform, but in the thick of the fighting always."

"So much for the politics, then," said the future editor; "what about the rest of the paper?"

"The rest of the paper is to remain very much what it is now, but to be better done," Vivian answered. "The scheme on which it was started is excellent; it is the execution which has been inadequate hitherto. Mr. Dircks wants to reach the most intelligent classes of the community, believing these to be the most influential. He expects you to make *Manhattan* so good

that every man of cultivation in the city will have to read it in self-defence. He hopes you will be able to get the best critics of the country to write for it, the best critics of literature and of the drama, of science and of the fine arts."

"They talk about the 'plain people,'" Dircks interjected. "It's them I'm after. But I don't think anything is too good for the plain people. What's too good for them ain't good enough for me."

"I think I begin to see what you want," Sartain said, modestly. "*Manhattan, a Metropolitan Review,* the paper written by New-Yorkers for New-Yorkers. I see it in my mind's eye as it ought to be. But whether it can ever be made to materialize, I don't know. If you think I can do it, I'm ready to try; and I'll do what I can. One thing I'd like to ask. Am I to have full control—or must I consult Mr. Dircks about everything? In other words, am I to be an office-editor only or the editor-in-chief? If I take the responsibility, I think I ought to have the power, don't you?"

Vivian looked towards Dircks for an answer to this question.

"I buy the paper and you run it," said the old man, thus appealed to. "I've heard you talk; I know what you think about things, and that's what I want you should say."

"I am to have both the power and the responsibility?" the young man returned. "Then all I can say is, that I will do my very best to make a paper that will be satisfactory to you."

"When shall you know whether they will sell out to you or not?" asked Vivian.

"The dude that is tired of losing money on it is to write me Tuesday," answered Dircks. "I made an offer, and I told him it was yes or no. He'll take it. I sized him up."

"If he accepts your proposition," Vivian inquired, "how soon can you pay the purchase-money and take possession?"

"I got the money now," said Dircks.

"It'll take money to run the paper, and lots of it, too, if it's to be well done," said Sartain, looking at Dircks, who was following every word.

But the old man repeated, "I got the money."

"Then that's all right," Sartain returned. "We must make the best show we can without wasting too much. I know just the man for a publisher, and I think a paper needs a publisher even more than it does an editor. I don't believe it's so very hard to make an interesting paper that people 'll want to read; but it isn't going to be easy to make them find that out, and it's hard to fill it up with ads. at the right price. There was a man in the office in Topeka who had just the gumption for that work."

"You write him to-night," said Dircks.

"I'll do it," replied Sartain. "Now, about special features? We'll have a short story every week, of course, just as they do now. What about a serial? Where are we to find a good American novel to take its place—something that has some relation to real life and to mankind as we know it nowadays?"

This question was addressed rather to Vivian, who made no response, however. Then Sartain directly asked him if he had not a novel that *Manhattan* could print as a serial.

"Thank you," the elder novelist answered. "The story I am finishing now is promised to the *Arctic;* and I doubt if I even begin another before we return from Europe late in the fall."

"What are we to do?" asked Sartain.

"Why do you not print your own novel of New York?" Vivian inquired; "the one you were telling me about—*Dust and Ashes,* isn't it?"

"Oh, I'm not at all satisfied with that," cried the younger novelist. "I've been trying to revise it; and I'm afraid I'd better give it up for a bad job."

"You may spoil it," said Vivian, kindly; "and if you wait until you are satisfied with your work, it is quite possible that you will die before you have published anything. Bring me *Dust and Ashes,* and I will see whether or not you need rend your garments also."

"That's very good of you," Sartain responded, gratefully; it seemed to him that fortune was strangely kind to him all at once.

After a few words more the discussion came to an end. Vivian asked his guests to walk into the front room and have a cup of tea. Dircks declined; he had an engagement. After helping the old man with his overcoat, and begging to be remembered to his daughter, Sartain passed into the drawing-room with Vivian.

The young man had followed his host along the dim corridor, feeling as though he were walking on air. The future was smiling on him. The dream of his youth was about to come true. His castles in the air were settling themselves solidly down on the rocky foundations of reality. He seemed to have before him now a chance such as was offered to few men as young

as he; and he was resolved to seize the opportunity and to make the most of it. He was not yet twenty-six, and he was to have absolute control of a New York weekly; and this paper was to be owned by the father of the girl he loved—an association certain to give him many a chance of seeing her. With a smile that almost broke into a laugh, he recalled a few of the numberless instances in literature where the good apprentice had married his master's daughter.

His head reeled with his sudden elation, and he could have danced into the drawing-room where Mr. Vivian's three daughters were. When he entered he checked himself and tried to regain his calmness. But his fancies were still whirling. He saw that Johnny was seated at the tea-table in one corner. She was a good fellow, Johnny was; and in sheer exuberance of joy the young man would have liked to go over and hug her. He was able to restrain himself and to take the chair she indicated to him after they had shaken hands.

She offered him a cup of tea, and when he took the cup from her his hand trembled, and he almost spilled the liquid in the lap of her tight-fitting cloth dress. Shy as he was generally, he wished now that he was alone with this friendly girl, and that he might bid her rejoice with him in the good fortune, bringing him close to the woman he loved.

Mr. Vivian came over to the tea-table and stood by Sartain's chair. "May I not have a cup of tea, too?" he asked.

"You poor dear!" his eldest daughter returned. "I forgot all about you. And Mr. Dircks, too—won't he have some?"

"Dircks would not wait," explained Vivian.

And Sartain added, "We had settled everything before he went."

"Then he will let Esther go with us?" Johnny went on, as she handed a cup to her father.

Sartain looked at her in silent surprise. There had been no talk of Esther's going anywhere with anybody.

"I had a little chat with him before Sartain joined us," said Vivian, "and he is willing to give his consent. He does not wish to be separated from his daughter for so long a period as six months—and that is not to be wondered at. But he sees that she is worn with her care of her grandmother, and he recognizes that she needs change of scene. He is ready to trust her with us."

"I should think he could!" cried Johnny. "I don't know which of us loves her most. He can be sure we'll all take the best of care of her."

"Is—is Miss Esther going anywhere with you?" Sartain managed to ask at last.

"Why, don't you know?" she returned. "We are all off to Europe early in April, to be gone till October, and we want to take Esther with us."

"To Europe?" Sartain repeated. "For six months?"

"It ought to benefit the child," said Vivian, "and I think we can make her have a good time."

In the presence of Johnny's father the young man did not venture to say anything more. But his heart sank, and his joy was withered in an instant. He looked at Johnny pitifully, and was surprised to see upon her face the same enigmatical expression he had seen there more than once before. This time he thought that there was a vague suggestion in it of defiance or of bravado, he did not know which.

"I told Adams we thought of making a little trip to see the castles of Touraine," continued Vivian, "and he says that, if we do, he will run down and join us."

"It will be great fun to have Madams with us," Johnny agreed, with a sudden light in her eye as though this were news she had not expected.

Sartain set his cup down almost untasted. Two or three minutes later he was out in the open air, trying to readjust himself to this unforeseen turn of events.

He took a long walk in Central Park, and he reached the boarding-house a little late for the cold supper which was served there every Sunday at half-past six.

CHAPTER XIV

After his supper the author of *Dust and Ashes* took the manuscript of that novel out of the trunk where he had packed it away, and read it with the utmost care. His work on *A Wolf at the Door* had put a gulf between him and the earlier story; and he was now able to survey his novel with detachment and a sense of perspective. He liked it better than he had hoped; it had something in it, after all; the local color was not always applied in the right place, but this was not beyond remedy. On the whole, and with all its faults, more obvious to him now than ever before, *Dust and Ashes* seemed to its author worthy of publication.

He was anxious to learn what Vivian would think of it; and on Monday morning, before going to the office of Carington & Company, he went up to Central Park and delivered the manuscript to the white-capped maid.

He began to make plans for the conduct of *Manhattan*. He wrote a tentative letter to the Topeka friend whom he had in view as the proper publisher of the journal he was to edit. He went to the Fried Cat on Monday to dine, and he renewed his acquaintance with Shields and Quinn, and was introduced to half a dozen other newspaper workers, to whom he

said nothing about the new *Manhattan*, but from whom he extracted not a little information about the prices paid in New York for literary work and about the men who had special knowledge on various subjects. He came to the conclusion that Shields himself could be made useful in a variety of ways, and Jerry Quinn also.

On Thursday, Sartain received a brief note from Vivian, asking if he could make it convenient to call Saturday afternoon about four.

Promptly at the hour named the young man presented himself, and was shown at once into Mr. Vivian's library. The manuscript of his novel was on the table.

"I have finished it, and I like it," said the host at once. "It interested me, and that is the prime quality. What I like most about it is its youthfulness, its freshness, its fervor, its ardor, its hearty confidence in the future, its belief that there is a good time coming, and coming very soon."

"I suppose that's what I do believe," the author responded, "but I didn't know I'd put it in the book."

"Can we keep anything out of a book that is in us?" asked Vivian. "Is it not rather true that we cannot put anything into a book except ourselves—what we know, what we have seen, what we have felt, what we have thought, and, above all, what we are? I suppose the real reason why I like your book is that I like you—and I find you in it."

"If only those like the book who know me and like me, I don't think I can count on a very large sale," the young man responded, flushing with the pleasure of hearing the other express a kindly feeling for him.

"I suppose the fellows who don't like me will find lots to pick at."

"Yes," Vivian said, honestly. "The book abounds in faults — but most of them are the result of inexperience, perhaps all of them. It has the advantages of your youth, and it has also the disadvantages. It is immature, of course."

"Then you would not advise me to use it as a serial in *Manhattan?*" Sartain asked, sorrowfully.

"But I should!" cried Vivian. "And I would not try to smooth it out any more. Let it go as it is—to touch it now is to risk the danger of ruining it. But if I may make a suggestion, I would not sign it. Do you remember Jerrold's jibe against the young author who 'took down his shutters before he had anything to put in the shop-windows?' Of course, that does not apply to you; but it has a kernel of wisdom. If I were you I would sign *Dust and Ashes* with a pen-name. If it hits the public taste, you can always disclose your identity."

"Isn't that a little cowardly?" the young author asked.

"It is what Dickens did, and Thackeray and George Eliot," replied the elder. "It comports with the rules of the courts, that no man is bound to criminate himself."

While they were discussing this there was a rap at the door and the maid ushered in Dircks. The old man entered the room less sluggish in his movements than usual.

"Well?" said Vivian, as they shook hands.

"I bought it," Dircks answered, and Sartain's heart leaped; he was to be the editor of *Manhattan*, after all.

"When do you take possession?" asked the host.

"They said they'd got contracts to fill," Dircks responded, "and they want two weeks more. That 'll be on the 20th."

"If I'm going to run the paper," said Sartain, "I shall be very glad of a fortnight to get ready in. I heard from Truax this morning—he's the man I think would be the best publisher. He's out of a job now."

"When is he coming here?" Dircks responded.

"He can come at once, if you engage him," was Sartain's answer.

"You telegraph him to-night," returned the old man. "There ain't no time to lose."

Then Mr. Vivian rose to his feet and interrupted them. "You two have various little matters of business to settle sooner or later. Why not do this now? I will leave you alone here, and when all is arranged you can join us in the front room." With that he left them.

The future editor of *Manhattan* and the future owner came to terms rapidly. The publisher and the editor were each to have a small weekly salary, with a percentage of the profits, whenever there should be any. Until after the paper paid expenses the editor's own contributions were to be gratuitous; he did not even ask to be remunerated for *Dust and Ashes,* the serial publication of which he intended to begin within a month after they should acquire control. He expected to write most of the political matter himself, and much of the literary criticism. Probably there would be only five or six or seven pages to fill with outside contributions. He proposed to have these signed, as far as possible, so that the opinions ex-

pressed might be warranted by the writers' names. To do this would require about a hundred dollars a week; and he thought, also, that the publisher should have an allowance of the same amount, to be spent in judicious advertising.

Dircks listened attentively as Sartain expounded these views, and he nodded whenever the other paused after making a point. The young man discovered that Dircks was far more inarticulate than he, and this emboldened him to talk freely. His own self-consciousness left him when he was aware that the man he was addressing was even shyer.

When he had made an end, all that Dircks responded was, "That's right. I got the money. You make the paper. You tell the truth in it, and give it to 'em hot and heavy! I pay the bill."

Then they went forward to the drawing-room, and found Esther near the centre window, talking to Mr. Vivian. Sartain saw that she looked almost as worn and wan as when she first returned from Wisconsin.

Johnny came forward and asked Mr. Dircks whether Esther would be ready to sail with them the first week in April. Sartain's heart sank, as it did always when he thought of her departure. Despite Johnny's efforts to draw him into the conversation, he stood apart for a few minutes, watching Esther and Vivian. The more closely he observed them the more convinced he became, not only that Esther did not suspect the force of the liking entertained for her by the father of her two school-fellows, but also that Vivian himself did not understand his own feelings. Sartain almost laughed aloud when the humor of the situation dawned upon him, that here before him was a man in love with a

pretty girl, and the man did not suspect it himself—and this unsuspecting lover was the author of novels highly commended for their delicate analysis of subtle emotion.

Then, at last, Esther felt the force of his gaze, and turned. When she saw him she smiled, and there came a faint flush on her cheeks. Mr. Vivian's eyes followed hers, and in a few seconds Esther was standing by her father's side chatting with Sartain, while the host was asking the old man if their business talk had been satisfactory. Johnny sat silent, looking intently from Esther to Sartain. The young man was a little uncomfortable under this inspection—he did not know why.

He was not sorry when Dircks broke up the conversation by telling Esther it was time for them to go. Sartain took leave of the Vivians at the same moment, again thanking the elder novelist for his kindness in reading *Dust and Ashes*.

In the Broadway car, going down, Dircks was even more taciturn than usual. Apparently absorbed in his own thoughts, he left the young people to themselves. It was a windy March day, and there was little warmth in the late sunshine, but it lighted the gold of her hair and brought out the paleness of her complexion. Loath as Sartain was to have her go to Europe, he saw that she needed rest and change; and he did not doubt that travel would be good for her. Her slight figure seemed to him even more fragile than ever. The Saturday afternoon throng was thick on the sidewalks, and the car itself filled rapidly as it passed the theatres where the matinées were just concluded, and there was no lack of handsome women in all the glow of

health. But no other girl had the exquisite grace he found in her, and no other radiated the same ineffable fascination.

He wanted to ask her many questions about herself, and yet he did not know where to begin. While he was hesitating she turned and said with a delicious smile, "So father has bought his paper and you are to edit it for him. Now I want you to promise me one thing."

He glowed with pleasure at this appeal as he answered that he would be delighted to do anything he could for her.

"You will not let father get too excited," she explained.

"Too excited?" he echoed, in surprise.

"I know he must seem very quiet to you," she continued. "But he isn't, really—that is, not all the time. Sometimes, when he is very much interested in anything, he gets all wrought up—just as he did at the Contemporary that night, you remember? And that isn't good for him, is it? Besides, I never know what he will do when he is excited."

Sartain told her that he did not see any probable cause of undue emotion in Mr. Dircks's ownership of *Manhattan*.

"I do not know about that," the girl returned; "isn't it to be a political paper? Are you not going to try to help change society? That's what father says."

"Yes," he answered. "We are going to try to make the world better—but we don't expect to do it overnight, you know."

"Are you sure father doesn't?" was her shrewd question.

"I'm not young enough to believe that any reform is achieved in a hurry," he responded; "and your father is older than I."

"That's all very well," she said, "but you don't know father as well as I do. Father doesn't like going slow."

Then he set out to explain to her just what it was he hoped to accomplish with the weekly after they had made it so interesting that people would have to buy it. He spread out his hopes before her, and his lofty desires; he expounded the reasons for the faith that was in him that the world could be made better; he etched the evils he meant to attack and to destroy; he caressed the ideal of good that he was determined to turn into a reality.

His enthusiasm was contagious, and as they were leaving the car at Seventeenth Street on their way to Stuyvesant Square, she cried, "How interesting it must be to be a man and to go into the world and do things! I don't know that I ever wished to be a man —it seems to me ever so much nicer to be a girl— but you almost make me think that a man is more useful."

This turned the current of their talk from *Manhattan* to themselves, or, rather, to a discussion of the relative importance of man and woman, in which they each used themselves as types. This debate carried them happily to the door of the house where she lived.

Dircks had walked on the other side of his daughter, taking no part in the talk. Now he roused himself from his revery.

"You send that telegram to-night," he said.

"That telegram?" Sartain replied. "Oh, to Truax!"

"Yes, Truax was his name," Dircks answered. "You tell him to get here as soon as he can. We can't begin too soon if we want to make the rich man sorry he was born."

CHAPTER XV

Into the ensuing four weeks were compacted more hard work, both mental and physical, and more stress and excitement than had been contained in any previous month of Sartain's existence, for in them he got out two numbers of *Manhattan* and he saw Esther Dircks off for Europe.

On Monday Truax arrived, a wizened young man, who was a New-Yorker by birth and who was delighted to get back to New York.

"That's the right idea, to have signed articles," he declared, "and get specialists to write 'em, too. The public likes to be instructed by a man who really knows about a thing. Have as much as you can written outside the office, too; that's the only way you can get variety. And don't have anything to do with any fellow who is recommended to you as an 'all-round newspaper-man'—he's absolutely the most ignorant creature in the world. He doesn't know anything at all, except what he has read in the papers."

In other ways the advice of Truax was excellent. "If I were you, I'd have all the short stories about New York," he declared. "You pass the word around Park Row that you want the kind of local sketch that gets into the Sunday papers, that you will let the writers sign, and that you'll pay magazine prices, and

you can have your pick and get the best. I'd call that department 'Tales of the Town.'"

In the course of the week Sartain took Truax to the Fried Cat, and there they met half a dozen young men, all eager to contribute to the new *Manhattan*. Adams dropped in also, and was persuaded to write a signed criticism of the spring exhibitions.

"All right," said the artist, "if you want me to do the Academy and the Artists, I'll do them. But if you expect me to scorch up and down, and knock the stuffing out of some of those old figure-heads, you'll get left, that's all. I shall pick out the half-dozen best things and I'll praise those, if you like. I'll tell the public just why these things are good. But you'll be disappointed if you want spicy writing. I'm not going to jump on my competitors in business, am I? I can afford to praise them—at least, I'll risk it; but I'm certain sure I can't afford to abuse them."

Adams asked various questions about the paper, and dropped valuable hints.

"I hope you're not going to have a Woman's Column, with portraits of the Third Vice-president *pro tem.* of the Harlem Ladies' Debating Club," said he. "There's only one thing more painful to me than a Woman's Column, and that's Household Hints, with practical articles on 'How to Make a Folding-bed out of a Soap-box.'"

Sartain assured him that there was nothing of that sort in *Manhattan*, but that he hoped to be able to interest the women of New York.

"Then you must go for them, hot and heavy," returned Adams. "Say they are a Reversion to the Primitive Type. They like to be scolded by a man—

they like nothing better. Don't you remember those 'Girl-of-the-Period' papers, how they hit home, and how the women devoured them? And, by-the-way, I can give you a bully title for a 'Girl-of-the-Period' paper. I was in a big department-store this afternoon; they were rebuilding part of it, and I suppose that's why I saw a sign on a door, 'Temporary Ladies' Dressing-room.' I laughed right out, and the floor-walker looked at me sorrowfully. But I couldn't help it—I know such lots of women who are only temporary ladies; don't you?"

Although lightness of touch was not Sartain's most obvious characteristic, he was quick enough to see that an amusing little essay might be written up to a title like "Temporary Ladies." He thanked Adams for the suggestion, and asked for more.

"I'll get out a search-warrant for my stray ideas," Adams responded; "and you shall have any more that are worth while. I'll help you out, if I can. I think you've got hold of a big thing. There are four millions of people right around us here in New York. Now if you can make a paper for them, first of all, you'll get all the circulation you want. And then the other sixty-six millions in the rest of the United States are sitting up nights to find out all about our goings-on here. What's interesting here in New York is interesting all over the United States."

Another casual remark of Adams was to the effect that very few of the people living in New York knew anything at all about its local history.

Sartain laughingly admitted that he himself was as ignorant as any one on this point. The next day he went to the library and looked up the books in

which the history of the city was set forth. To his surprise he discovered that the annals of New York were both picturesque and interesting. The notes taken during that first day's work on the history of New York suggested to him that it would be attractive to publish in *Manhattan* a series of anecdotic papers on points of interest in the city—the Battery, the City Hall Park, Union Square, Central Park, and the Riverside Drive.

These notes also helped in preparing the opening article in the first number he edited. In this rather high-strung essay Sartain declared that New York was not only the gateway of all America, the emporium of a republican empire, the caravansary of a continent, it was also the true cosmopolis, the real world-city, with an honorable past and a triumphant future. The struggle visible in the streets to-day was mightier than any battle of any ancient war, and it was worthier of epic treatment. The plume of steam that waved from the top of every tall building was like the white feather of Henry of Navarre ; it was to be seen in the midst of the mellay only, in the thickest of the tussle. Then he pointed his moral to the effect that we New-Yorkers ought to take pride in our noble town, and that we ought to be unceasing in our efforts to improve it by bettering the conditions of life for the laborer, by making the city clean and healthy, and by administering its imperial revenues honestly and judiciously.

When Vivian saw Sartain, after the appearance of the number of *Manhattan* containing this resonant eulogy of the city, he said, smiling : "I think you said as much for New York as you very well could. But you must not overdo it. Excess of pride always in-

vites a protest. You remember what Lowell wrote in a private letter once, thirty or forty years ago? That New York was not Paris, but rather plaster of Paris—'a bad cast of a Bernini original.' That is as far below the truth, I think, as your laudation overtops it."

The second number was very much better, so the editor thought. He began in it to publish *Dust and Ashes* as a serial, signing it, not with his own name, but with "S. Francis," a pseudonym that suggested its real author to those who knew.

This second number appeared on the first Thursday in April, the morning when the Vivians were to sail for Europe, carrying Esther away with them, and the editor took a copy of *Manhattan* in his pocket when he went to the dock to see his friends off.

During the month of Esther's preparation for her European trip, Sartain had done his best to see as much of her as he could, but fortune had not favored him. He had gone to the Vivians' every Saturday afternoon in the hope of meeting her, but she was there only once, and then the twins had monopolized her. He had called in Stuyvesant Square every Sunday afternoon, but once she was out, and once her father had insisted on his discussion of certain details of publishing, and once there were other callers to whom she had to devote herself. He would have called in the evening, but he had received somehow an impression that Dircks liked then to monopolize his daughter's society.

One afternoon there was, and only one, when he had her all to himself for nearly an hour; they talked about her travels in Europe, and about his labors on *Manhattan,* and chiefly about themselves; and Sar-

tain had returned to his boarding-house with joy in his heart that he had made another great advance in intimacy, only to find on the Saturday following, when he caught a glimpse of her at the Vivians', that she had gone back to her earlier attitude of remote friendliness.

The day came all too swiftly when she was to depart, and Sartain awaked with a dull ache in his heart and with an insistent depression. The ship was to start at eleven, and Sartain arrived on the pier nearly an hour earlier, to find the shed crowded with carriages, express-wagons, and baggage-carts. The decks were thronged also, and the gangways were almost impassable.

It was the first time that he had ever set foot on a great ocean-steamer; and it was with keen interest that he noted all he saw about him—the huge boat itself, the active attendants, the passengers of all sorts, the friends who had come down to bid them farewell. He did not know where to look for Esther. He walked through the broad dining-saloon, and at one end of the central table he saw half a dozen baskets of flowers with dangling cards, revealing that they had been sent to one or another of Mr. Vivian's three daughters. This, then, was the captain's table Sartain had heard them talk about. On it he also found the basket of fruit, hot-house grapes, and California pears that he had ordered for Esther. Here was where they were to sit, but they themselves were not here.

He made his way to the spar-deck with difficulty, and there he perceived the Vivians. The twins were surrounded by a group of brilliantly dressed girls and of faultlessly attired young men, all talking at once

and laughing abundantly. Adams was standing on one side with Johnny and her father. Sartain handed Mr. Vivian a copy of the new number of *Manhattan*.

"Do you recommend it as a panacea for sea-sickness?" asked Adams. "If it really is efficacious, you can get a large circulation in less than no time."

"Why does not Esther come up on deck?" asked Vivian.

"I don't know, I'm sure," his daughter answered. "I left her with her bag nearly unpacked. I suppose she is having a few last words with her father down there."

With the inconsistency excusable on an April day, the clouds that had hung low early in the morning had now all cleared away, and the sky was reflected in the broad river almost unflecked. The sun shone fiercely, and there was only an intermittent breeze blowing in from Sandy Hook. Vivian took Sartain forward to show the young man his own deck stateroom.

They were gone for a few minutes only, and when they returned they found Esther talking to Johnny and Adams, while Dircks stood silent by her side.

While Mr. Vivian greeted Dircks, Sartain stepped up to Esther, and in a moment more a movement of the crowd that packed the deck had separated them from the others.

She thanked him at once for the fruit, and said it was so good of him to send it, and declared that she was especially fond of grapes. He looked at her with delight and sadness commingled; it was a joy always to be near her, to hear her voice, to gaze at her, to admire the exquisite curve of her mouth, and her broad

brow with its straightly pencilled eyebrows; it was sorrow to know that he could not have this happiness again for the better part of a year.

So absorbed was he in these thoughts that he made no response to her little speech of thanks until the silence recalled him to himself, and then he broke out, "I—I'm glad you like grapes. I—I thought they might be refreshing."

Sartain was stabbed by jealousy at the thought of Vivian's having her under his wing for six long months. In that time the elder novelist might find out that he was in love with her, and he might be able to persuade her to marry him.

"Miss Esther!" he broke in, abruptly, as this picture arose before him; and then, all at once, he recognized the absurdity of his interference.

"Yes?" she answered, as though wondering a little at his sudden warmth.

"Oh," he returned, shamefaced, "I—I was only going to ask if—if you expect to be long in England?"

"We are going straight to London," she returned, "and I believe we are to stay there six weeks, or till the beginning of June. Then we go to Paris for a little while, and after that to Carlsbad. We expect to be back in France early in August, and then we run down to the castles on the Loire. Mr. Vivian hasn't decided what we are to do after that, but we are to be home about the first of October."

"Six months," said he; "that's six long months."

"Yes," she returned, "we are not coming home for six months."

He wanted to ask her if she really wished to go away so long, but it seemed to him that this would be im-

pertinent. From her manner he had an impression that she was sailing willingly enough and yet regretfully.

"It will be a change for you," he said, "to go to all those places and to do so many interesting things."

"I suppose it will," she answered, and then she sighed gently, or Sartain thought she did.

"I hope you will come back ever so much stronger," he continued.

"That's why I'm going," she said, "to get my strength again."

"But you will enjoy it, too," he cried, answering rather what he thought was her meaning. "I wish I were going over now to see London and Paris, to tread the streets Thackeray trod and Balzac."

"Why can't you run over for a few weeks?" she asked; and then she answered her own question. "But of course you can't. You must not leave the paper."

"I must not leave the paper," he echoed.

"And you must not leave father, either," she returned, smiling. "Really, I think I am showing extraordinary confidence in you, Mr. Sartain, to trust father with you."

He thrilled deliciously at this assertion. "I didn't know you expected me to take care of Mr. Dircks," he began, "but I'll do it, since you wish it."

"I do wish it," she responded, earnestly. "I shall be ever so much obliged to you if you will look after him. I have always done it since mother died, and, now I'm going to leave him for the first time, I know he'll be lonely. It seems very selfish of me to go, doesn't it?—and I've been ready to back out a dozen

times this last fortnight. But I shall feel ever so much safer if I know you are going to have him on your mind, and to see that he doesn't get into trouble." Then the mischievous smile which was one of her chief fascinations came back.

"I'll do my best for him," said Sartain, rejoicing that she had given him a commission.

"Father's such a big baby in some things," she went on, "and he needs somebody to look after him."

Sartain had given himself up to the pleasure of this confidential conversation with the woman he loved, and he had taken no heed of the flight of time. Now a bell clanged repeatedly, and a steward passed along the deck crying out, "Ashore all that's going!"

"Where's father?" the girl asked, and Sartain instantly recognized his own selfishness in keeping for himself the last few minutes of her company when her father was parting with her for the first time.

In the reflux of the throng which began now to thin out, Esther and Sartain were able soon to rejoin the Vivians. The girl seized her father and began to give him her final instructions in an eager whisper.

Vivian and Johnny, Adams and Sartain, stood on one side while the male friends of the twins made their adieus and the female friends began to exchange their final kisses and embraces.

When these young friends had withdrawn, leaving them immense bunches of roses, Sartain and Adams shook hands with all the Vivians in turn before Esther and her father rejoined the group; and then, while Dircks had a final word with Mr. Vivian, Sartain stepped aside and let Adams say good-bye to Esther first.

At last he held her hand in his for a moment. "I

hope you will have a good time," he said, "and come back strong."

"Thank you," she answered.

"And I'll look after Mr. Dircks," he continued.

"Thank you for that, too," she returned, with a smile, although he thought he saw a tear in her eye.

He walked to the gang-plank with Adams, leaving Dircks alone with her at the side of the ship.

"If you want to see them off, you had best get a good place at the end of the pier," suggested Adams.

Sartain waited till Dircks joined them, and then they went down the shed and out upon the open space near the river. Excited as the young man was by the parting from Esther, he could not but take note of the scenes on all sides of him, of the revelation of character under the stress of impending separation; he could not but observe the mingled humor and pathos to be discovered at the sailing of a great ocean-steamer. He saw that here was material for literary use, and quite unconsciously he began to contrive how he could utilize it in one of the unwritten chapters of *A Wolf at the Door*.

Just in front of him were a score of young fellows, decked with their college colors and making themselves hoarse with their strident and staccato college yell; and to these violent demonstrations a youth in the stern of the ship made suitable acknowledgment.

The boat began to back out slowly into the stream, escorted by a pair of puffing tugs; and soon the group glided into view that Dircks and Sartain and Adams were waiting to see. The twins were leaning against the rail, and the full sunlight brought out the fiery redness of their hair; they held in their hands the

gigantic bunches of roses, as full-blown as they were themselves, and when they came opposite to the boisterous group of men and girls who had come down to bid them farewell they picked out one rose after another and threw them over on the pier-head for the young men to scramble for.

Esther stood between Johnny and Mr. Vivian. Sartain guessed that she was exercising all the self-control she had, trying not to weep under the gaze of the father whom she was leaving for so long. Yet, do what she would, a tear trembled from the lid and ran sparkling down her cheek just as she was passing them. Then Sartain saw Johnny clasp her with a protecting arm.

The steamer slowly backed into the splendid river, swung around and steamed away on its three-thousand-mile voyage.

When the boat was in mid-stream, and the faces of those on board could no longer be made out, Adams followed the example of the great majority and took his departure. But Sartain remained with Dircks, and they watched the boat dwindle down in the distance till it was only a dark spot under the towering figure of Liberty.

CHAPTER XVI

It was about the middle of April when Esther Dircks went to Europe, and she did not return to America until after the middle of October. There were days during those six months when Sartain was ready to declare that he had never known time to go so slowly. He missed Esther intensely, and she was rarely absent from his thoughts. But he was very busy also, and his mind was so incessantly occupied with *Manhattan* that it was not often he had leisure to repine or to commiserate his own loneliness.

He kept a sharp watch for the news of the arrival out of the boat which bore her away; and he made a careful calculation as to the day when her first letter from England could reach her father.

When he guessed that the old man had received this, he called to get Dircks's opinion on some point in the management of *Manhattan*, and before the interview was over he had extracted from her father most of the contents of the hasty note she had written on the morning they landed. He was glad to learn that the voyage had been swift and smooth, and that she thought the sea-air had done her good already, since her appetite was rapidly returning.

Having given Sartain this much information, Dircks went on to talk about his daughter, much to the sur-

prise of the young man, who had hitherto found her father slow of speech, not to say taciturn. It was as though in her absence there was one subject about which he must speak, at whatever cost to his habitual restraint. He told the man who loved her how good she was to her father, how tolerant of his whims and extravagances, how firm when his vagaries needed to be checked, how loving always. It delighted Sartain to hear her praised, and he drank in every word greedily, agreeing with every statement her father made. Thus was established the habit, on Dircks's part, of reading his daughter's letters to Sartain as soon as they were received; and she wrote twice a week regularly.

Nor was it from Dircks alone that the young man got news of the woman he loved, for she was mentioned frequently in the letters that Vivian wrote. As it happened, a novel of Vivian's was published the day after the author had gone away to Europe. For the number of *Manhattan* which appeared on the morning that the Vivians landed in England, Sartain wrote a signed review of this story, in which he expressed his high admiration of Vivian as a novelist. By return mail—that is to say, in less than three weeks—there came a letter from Vivian, written in his careful, copper-plate hand, and with every sentence as neatly turned as though it were intended for publication, thanking the young editor for his criticism and acknowledging its justice both in the praise and the blame; the former might be overstrained, the latter was not, since the author was well aware that it was the weak spot of the plot the critic had put his finger on.

In that first letter Vivian went on to narrate their

doings in London, their having tea on the terrace of the Houses of Parliament, their going to supper on the stage of a famous theatre after the first night of a new play, their dinners here and there; and, incidentally, Esther's name was written more than once, and at the end Vivian bid Sartain tell her father that she was being benefited by the trip, and that she was gaining strength daily in consequence of the change of scene.

Here Sartain thought he saw the opportunity, and he answered Vivian's letter at once, asking advice about *Manhattan*, giving the latest bits of literary gossip, and concluding by begging Vivian to assure Miss Esther that her father was well, and that he was keeping an eye on him. Thus, all through the summer, Sartain managed to maintain communication with Esther, through Vivian on one side and through Dircks on the other.

In the meantime he was keen to see what impression *Dust and Ashes* was making on the public, as it appeared week by week in the paper. He had not confessed his authorship to any one except Truax; and as the story was signed with the name of "S. Francis," Frank Sartain was not giving himself away when he asked Shields and Quinn and the other contributors how they liked it. Not suspecting his personal interest in the question, they one and all confessed that they were not reading it—they never did read serials.

"I don't want to take any story on the instalment plan," explained Jerry Quinn. "I like a joint of roast beef better than I do a string of sausages."

In fact, the author could not find anybody who was reading his serial, either in the office or out. He examined all the exchanges eagerly to see whether any

of the other papers, the dailies or the weeklies in other cities, had not a good word to say for this story by "S. Francis"; but he found nothing. It seemed to him at last as though *Dust and Ashes* was being paid out into a vacuum, week by week. He decided finally that he would willingly have seen it abused by every critic in the country rather than not have heard from it at all.

When they took possession of the paper, Truax had sent out a carefully devised announcement of the new policy of *Manhattan*, and of the change of editor; and this paragraph was copied, without comment, all over the country, from the *Gossip*, the literary weekly of New York, to the *Golden Fleece*, the literary weekly of San Francisco.

"It's almost worth while to have a new editor now and then," said Truax; "you get such a lot of free advertising out of it, if you know how to go about it."

"You'll get something else, too," Jerry Quinn added; "you'll get all the shop-worn manuscripts in the country, that's what you'll get. Every fellow who has his story rejected everywhere will take it down, roll it up again, and send it to you within twenty-four hours after he reads that paragraph."

"That accounts for the number of impossible stories I've been receiving the past fortnight," said the new editor. "I didn't get a single thing fit to print out of the first hundred I dug through,"

"But you will, though," declared Shields. "I remember that the first poem of mine the *Arctic* accepted had been rejected by the *Dial* for the Sunday paper, and rejected even by the *Gossip*. It's true, I told the *Gossip* I expected to be paid for it, and then it came back to me by return mail."

"Did the *Gossip* ask you to contribute to its symposium, Clarry?" asked Jerry Quinn; "the one they had last winter—the one about the nature of the first message we should try to send to Mars?"

"They did that," answered the Irishman; "and they waxed hot in the collar when I asked them how much they expected to pay for my opinion. They said they thought I would be glad to take part in a discussion of great public interest. I told them that I would take part, with pleasure, for ten dollars a thousand words. And now the *Gossip* is always criticising my verses and saying that I lack the divine afflatus."

"This dunning men of letters for gratuitous copy seems to me very like blackmail," Sartain asserted. "*Manhattan* is going on the principle that the laborer is worthy of his hire."

"That's so," said Shields; "what's good enough to print is good enough to pay for; that's what I say."

"I don't know as I'd say it," Jerry returned, "and I don't know as I would. They are paying you with the ad.—remember that. There's lots of us always ready to advertise ourselves, and mad enough if we're left out."

This conversation took place one afternoon towards the end of May in the office of *Manhattan*, which was on the third floor of a shabby old house in Union Square, a dwelling once, and now let out to tenants of all sorts. Of the two front rooms which the paper rented, Truax kept the larger for the publishing department, and on the partitioned shelves against the walls were stored the back numbers. The smaller, which had originally been a hall bedroom, was reserved for Sartain as the editorial sanctum. It con-

tained a desk in fairly good repair, a cane-bottom chair for the editor himself, and a wooden settle, on which the visiting contributor could sit comfortably. It was Truax who declared that it would never do to make it easy for callers, or they would stay too long.

"By the way, Shields," Sartain continued, with a little hesitation, "there's no use in your trying to tuck the names of your hatter and your tailor into the paragraphs you send in. I'm on the lookout now, and I shall kill all your puffs."

"Ah, come now," answered Shields, pleadingly, "why not leave me in one now and then? You see, it's this way—if I say a good word for my tailor in the papers, or for my hatter, or for the man who makes my shoes, then he's never in so great a hurry to bother me with his bill."

"If any man wants an ad. in *Manhattan* he must step up to the captain's office and pay for it," said Truax.

"And is it an ad. that you'll call a few pleasant words now and then to confer happiness on a worthy tradesman, and to make him feel a little less distrustful?" Shields rejoined. "And you don't pretend now to make your *Manhattan* any more high-toned, as you call it, than the *Spectator*—I mean the original *Spectator* of Queen Anne's time?"

Sartain admitted that he could hardly hope to maintain a higher standard than Steele and Addison.

"Well, then," returned Shields, triumphantly, "they did it. They puffed their friends—and I don't mean the friends they had a dish of tea with or a glass of wine; I mean the tradesmen they did business with—their advertisers, in short. In the *Spectator*, and in the *Tatler*,

too, Steele was forever saying a good word for the wine merchant — what's that his name was? — the wine merchant who had an advertisement on the last page."

"Did you see the way the *Upper Ten* jumped on you this week, Sartain?" asked Quinn. "They call you the Exile from Kansas, and the Topeka Fugitive, and lots of other things. I guess they want you to notice them."

"And I'm not going to do it," the editor asserted. "Why should I sink *Manhattan* to the level of the *Upper Ten?* I hate that sort of thing, anyway. You know what Emerson Adams says. He says American journalism is like Chinese warfare—there's so much beating of the tomtoms, and wearing of masks to frighten the enemy, and throwing of stink-pots."

"I wish one of the big dailies would jump on us every day—the *Gazette* now, or the *Dial,*" said Traux; "that would be an ad. if you like."

"The big dailies here won't take any notice of us," Sartain admitted; "but the out-of-town papers are very friendly."

"If that's so, why not get up something to please the people in the other cities?" suggested Jerry Quinn. "It would be a big joke to have a Chicago letter in your New York weekly. I could write it for you without leaving my seat."

"And I can write you a Boston letter, if you'd like it," Shields asserted, "and one that they'd think was written by a member of their own Brahmin caste—barring a 'will' for a 'shall' here and there, that maybe you could put straight for me."

Thus was suggested a series of articles which did much to make *Manhattan* better known. In the first

issue in June, a notice at the head of the editorial column announced that in the next number would appear the first of a group of "Letters from Country Towns. No. I.—Chicago." This impertinently effective announcement was due to Emerson Adams, whom Sartain had told about the new series. Quinn wrote the letter from Chicago in a vein of ironic humor, which served as an example to the writers of the other letters. Adams gave Shields the latest bits of unprinted personal gossip from Boston, and as a result half the newspapers in New England made editorial reference to "Letters from Country Towns. No. II.—Boston." As it happened, Truax had been on a Philadelphia paper for a few months, and he supplied the local color needed for No. III., one allusion in which—a mention of the sign near the Red Bridge, inviting the passer-by to partake of catfish and waffles—for some strange reason, stirred the wrath of the Pennsylvanian journalists, who promptly abused *Manhattan*.

These letters of "Asmodeus" (for such was the signature Sartain attached to them all) really helped the circulation of the paper, in spite of the fact that July is generally the worst month in the year for the sale of a weekly. Sartain was a little chagrined that these girding trifles should be more potent in arresting public attention than his own serial story, or than the serious discussions of public affairs he contributed every week editorially.

The sketches and letters were to Sartain of value only as they might attract readers to the paper. The object for which the paper itself existed was the arousing of public opinion against the inequalities and the

injustices obvious enough in the structure of modern society. He was not a shrill and blatant assailant of the rich, but he was unceasing in pointing out the many ways in which the present organization of commerce bore down heavily on the poor; he was unsparing in his attacks on those corporations which sought to set themselves above the law; he was insistent in holding men in public life up to a high standard. In applying these principles of militant journalism, as he understood it, he had the support of Mr. Dircks, who was always particularly pleased when some well-known man of large means was held up to obloquy for a breach of the law. If the editor had allowed himself to be influenced unduly by the owner, *Manhattan* would have become more and more violent week by week.

"It ain't hot enough!" the old man would say. "You give it to them hot and heavy."

And then Sartain would try in vain to get Dircks to formulate his opinions. Apparently the old man had never thought out what he felt, and certainly he could not make his views clear to any one else. Dircks's animosity was always at white heat for the prosperous evil-doer, but it cooled at once when justice overtook the rascal. Whether or not the man deserved the punishment about to be bestowed on him had nothing to do with Dircks's feelings towards him.

"What's the use of pounding him any more?" the old man asked Sartain one day in September, after the publication in *Manhattan* of an article calling for the full penalty of the law upon a recently arrested forger who had abused a trust reposed in him. "The man's

down, ain't he? Well, then, why not let up on him? Don't hound him any more."

Sartain told Adams about this when they dined that evening together under a tent in the back-yard of the Fried Cat, and the painter said, "That makes out my theory of Dircks—that he's always on the side of the under dog, even when the under dog deserves his licking. It's very curious, I confess, and I don't understand it, but that's it, I'm sure. If Benedict Arnold were in jail, the old man wouldn't want him harshly dealt with."

"How does that fit in with his hatred of ill-gotten wealth?" asked Sartain.

"It's got to fit in the best way it can," Adams answered. "And maybe, after all, he isn't as violent as you think he is. It isn't so very radical, is it, to want to set the classes against the masses?"

With Adams, who had been obliged to forego his trip to Europe, on account of a commission to paint the decorative panels for the ballroom of a new cottage at Lenox, in which the first dance was to be given in September, Sartain took his share of the summer amusements of the city; they ran down to Coney Island to dine, and they lounged away an evening now and then at one or another of the roof-gardens. The summer wore away slowly, and yet when it was over, and when October came, it suddenly seemed to Sartain as though the six months had fled past with unprecedented swiftness.

CHAPTER XVII

TOWARDS the end of September, an editorial article of Sartain's happened to hit the public craving for novelty. The municipal election was unusually important that year, in view of the impending consolidation of Brooklyn and of various other outlying suburbs with New York. Sartain urged that the enlarged metropolis should be set off from the rest of the State of New York and made a free city, administering its own affairs under a new charter, and entirely without interference from Albany; and that this reform be embodied in a constitutional amendment. The *Daily Dial* promptly proceeded to hold this suggestion up to ridicule, and to declare that the hebetudinous crank who advanced it should be sent back to the asylum from which he had been prematurely discharged. The next day the *Gotham Gazette* (in accordance with its established habit of taking the side opposite to that supported by the *Dial*) copied Sartain's article in full and advocated his plan in a column editorial. Thereupon the *Dial* returned to the attack and asserted that such a scheme appealed to only scatter-brained incompetents and to megalomaniac mattoids. Then the *Gazette* sent out its host of reporters and interviewed one hundred prominent citizens, asking every one whether he had read the article in *Manhattan* and

what he thought of the plan of municipal independence it proposed. As a result of this discussion, the whole edition of that week's *Manhattan* was sold out in two days after publication, and the paper had to go to press again. Of the next number, ten thousand copies were printed boldly, and Sartain's second article on "New York can Stand Alone" was adroitly advertised in all the leading papers. But it attracted less attention than the first, for the scheme was no longer a novelty. Still the circulation rose a little, and Truax kept on advertising inexpensively but effectively the two or three contributions in each number he thought most likely to please the popular taste.

Sartain was a modest young man, and, with all his confidence in the future, he did not overestimate his own immediate importance; yet it was with a twinge of regret that he had to recognize the hard fact that the serial publication of *Dust and Ashes* had in no wise helped the circulation of the journal he edited. As a result of this, his liking for it returned; there were deficiencies enough, and blemishes not a few, but it was an honest piece of work, for all that, and not one to be ashamed of. With this in his mind, he did not see why he should not appeal from the narrow circle that had been glancing over *Manhattan* to the broader body that read books. He sent the pages of the paper containing *Dust and Ashes* to John Rudderforth & Company, the publishers of Vivian's books.

A fortnight later he received a note asking him to call at the office of John Rudderforth & Company. When he presented himself, he was told that their readers had reported favorably on the book, and that they were prepared to bring it out immediately on

the usual terms, the terms they always offered to an unknown author for his first book—ten per cent. on the published price after the sale of one thousand copies. Although Sartain thought this a hard bargain, he accepted with delight.

Dust and Ashes was published a few days before Esther Dircks returned. The night before publication a package containing six copies was delivered at the boarding-house in Irving Place; and when Sartain had eagerly uncovered the contents, his heart was filled with joy. Here was his first-born, at last; and it seemed to him a very promising child. He dandled it in his hands, he patted the back of the volumes affectionately, he admired the brilliant cover-stamp, he was shocked when he opened the pages and his eye fell at once upon the inevitable misprint. He put aside a copy for Esther and another for Vivian.

Then he began to be anxious about the way it would be received by the critics. Although he was himself the editor of a critical journal, and knew that the writers of book-reviews were human, after all, like the rest of us, still there survived in him a dread of the tribunal the most of whose members were masked. The notices came in time, one after another, favorable mostly, and mostly perfunctory, as though they had been written in a hurry after a hard day's work by some one who had no real relish for literature.

The young author greedily read them all, good or bad, long or short. He found himself hungering for them, and counting that day lost when his book was not praised or blamed at least once somewhere in the United States. He would go into the book-stores just to see if *Dust and Ashes* was properly displayed on the

shelves; and he would have liked to ask the salesmen how the book was going, if this had not seemed to him undignified. Even when he did not enter, he peered into the window to see if among the many volumes there displayed he could detect the red and gold that emblazoned the back and sides of his book; and he looked at the bulletin-boards under the windows of the book-stores to see if any of them contained the poster announcing the novel he had written. There were times when he was disposed to declare that the book publishers did not advertise as well as the theatrical managers, and when he would have liked to see the title of his story displayed on all the board fences by day and illuminated in electric letters against the sky by night.

It was perhaps due in part to the excitement of the publication of *Dust and Ashes* that he was able to work feverishly on *A Wolf at the Door*. He liked the second novel better than the first; he had grappled with a stronger theme, and he had been more skilful in his application of local color. There were scenes in *A Wolf at the Door* which struck Sartain as containing the very essence of New York. As a whole, the book seemed to him more than pretty fair, although it was not so fine as he had hoped to make it, of course. It took its place as an important element of the larger panorama of life in New York which he had planned to produce. He had outlined a cycle of stories, all related and all independent; they were to be more closely knit together than the *Chronicles of Barset*, but not so tightly linked as the *Rougon-Macquart* series; probably the *Human Comedy* was the best model, after all.

Of all the creatures of his imagination the one he

had taken most delight in depicting was the heroine, who was an idealization of Esther Dircks as she appeared to her lover. While trying to avoid all obvious personalities, he had given to the girl in his story the physical fascination of Esther Dircks and her charm of manner, and even some of her peculiarities of gesture. Sometimes he was seized with a fear that he had merely photographed her, and that everybody who read the book would recognize her at once; sometimes he thought that the circumstances in which the heroine was placed were so different from any in which Esther had ever found herself that her friends would never suspect any likeness; sometimes he was even afraid that she would not see herself in his heroine, and that, therefore, she would not thus discover how she appeared in his eyes; and sometimes he was horror-stricken at the supposition that she might deem his deed impertinent, and as a punishment dismiss him from her friendship.

He longed for the sight of her face again, and for the sound of her voice. As October wore away, and the day drew nigh when the boat on which she was sailing homeward with the Vivians might be expected to arrive, he became almost restless. He was young and healthy, and he slept well at night; but by day he was possessed by impatience. He did his work in the mornings with fierce energy, and he went out in the afternoons for long walks. He scanned the weather reports before breakfast, to make sure that no storm was approaching which could delay her arrival. Twenty-four hours before it was possible for the vessel to reach our shore, even if the voyage were to break the record, he seized every pretext to leave the office and to rush

into the telegraph-station to ask if any word had yet been received from the incoming boat.

Finally, on the morning of the last Wednesday in October, Sartain was roused about six o'clock, and a message from the telegraph company informed him that the ship had arrived at Quarantine, and would reach the company's dock a little before eight o'clock.

It was a little after seven when Sartain walked out on the pier-head and looked down the bay in vain. Already the friends and families of the expected passengers were beginning to collect. The blue-coated custom-house officers were gathered in knots near the mouth of the immense shed that covered the pier. The engineer was getting up steam in a small engine that served the derricks which were to lift the baggage out of the hold. Along the sides of the shed, at equal intervals, were the letters of the alphabet, and thirty or forty porters sat on their trucks, ready to wheel the trunks and bundles to the spaces reserved for the passengers having the same initial.

All these preparations Sartain observed with impatience; he could not sit still; he began pacing up and down the pier, always going out on the end to see if the steamer were yet in sight. In one of these rapid walks he almost ran into Esther's father.

"It's very good of you to come down here just to see my little girl," said Dircks, piercing Sartain with a swift glance from under his beetling eyebrows. "I take it very kindly of you."

Sartain wished that he had the courage to tell the old man that he loved the little girl quite as much as her father did. As it was, he did not know what to say. Fortunately Dircks was a little excited also. He

had never before been separated from his only child for so long a period. He walked down to the pier-head with Sartain, quite as impatient as the young man was, and wholly unconscious of the young man's hesitation in responding to him.

When they stepped out on the river end of the wharf, they found an excited group pointing down the bay, and they heard one voice saying, "There she is! There she is! She'll be here in ten minutes now."

A stately craft was to be seen afar steaming up the river; but it was more than fifteen minutes before she checked her speed opposite to the company's pier. While the tugboats darted forward to carry the cables that were to warp the ship in, Sartain and Dircks tried in vain to pick out the girl they were there to greet from among the hundreds of men and women who crowded the deck of the boat and who were waving handkerchiefs frantically as the vessel drew nearer and nearer.

At last Dircks cried, "I see her! I see her!"

"Where?" asked Sartain.

"There," the old man answered, pointing with his huge finger; "there—on the upper deck, under the bridge—under the bridge, see? There's those two red-headed girls, and that's Esther between them. I can see her plain enough, but she don't see me." And he took off his black slouch hat and swung it in the air.

Sartain looked where her father told him, and as the boat approached he was able slowly to make sure that the woman he loved was again in sight.

"I do hope she 'ain't been sick or nothing," said Dircks.

"She looks well," the young man answered, as calmly as he could. His heart was beating violently. He thought he had never seen her looking more beautiful. She was now close enough for him to behold her distinctly. He could even observe the animation on her face and the light that glowed in her eyes.

Although the bow of the boat was now almost at the point of the pier, Esther had not yet discovered her father. She was standing between the twins, and Johnny and Mr. Vivian were visible just behind them. It was Johnny who first saw Dircks and told Esther where the old man was standing.

When she looked into her father's eyes she leaned forward and waved her handkerchief and blew him a kiss. Then catching sight of Sartain standing by the side of Dircks, she drew back startled, while a blush swiftly mantled her cheeks and fled as swiftly.

Almost immediately the boat began to slide into her position alongside the pier, and the people on the pier-head rushed back to the opening where the gangplank was ready hoisted.

Esther was one of the first of the passengers to come ashore. She flew down the bridge and rushed into her father's arms, wholly regardless of those present.

"There, there, my little girl," said Dircks, soothing her, "you're back now, and it's all right. I hope you had a good time."

"Yes, indeed, father," she answered. "I enjoyed every minute of it—and I kept wishing and wishing that you were with me. I saw ever so many things that would have interested you—pictures, you know, and operas."

"Here's Mr. Sartain come down to see you, too,"

the old man told her as she released herself from his arms.

The young man had been standing a little behind her father, not wishing to intrude. Now he stepped forward, his heart again beating high with joy and hope.

"Oh, Mr. Sartain," she said, very calmly, holding out her hand, "it was very good of you to come down with father."

He wanted to tell her that he had come before her father, that he had come alone, that he had come for her only; but he was disconcerted by her placidity. He had been looking forward ardently to a meeting with the woman he loved after half a year's absence. He was taken aback to find her greeting him in a friendly fashion only.

It took him a minute to adjust himself to the new conditions, so different were they from those he had day-dreamed about. He loved her, and he knew it; but she did not know it. How should she? And she did not love him. Why should she? He recognized that he had been going too fast, and that he had no right to expect her to meet him on any other than the footing of friendship on which they had parted. He had no claim to be received as anything but an acquaintance—he was not even an intimate—and she had smiled on him and shaken hands with him just as she would with any other man with whom she was familiar. He accepted the situation, but he shrank away, and all his shyness returned as the Vivians came pouring down the gang-plank.

The twins were caught up by a band of young men and maidens, who swept them off to one side of the

shed. Mr. Vivian and Johnny came towards Dircks. Sartain noticed that Mr. Vivian was dressed with scrupulous precision in spick-and-span clothes, and that Johnny, a little plumper than before, was clad in a very tight-fitting, tailor-made suit.

Mr. Vivian shook hands with Dircks. "You see we have taken good care of her," he said. "We are bringing her back with the roses in her cheeks again."

Esther told her father how good Mr. Vivian had been to her, and so had Johnny, and Dora, and Theo, too—nobody could have been nicer.

Sartain scrutinized every expression on Vivian's face and Esther's, and weighed every intonation, to see if there had been any change in their relations since they had left New York. So intent was he on those observations that he failed to see the neatly gloved hand which Johnny extended to him.

"I'm back, too," she said, covering him with confusion. Then Vivian also shook hands with him; and the five of them stood there for a minute chatting near the foot of the gang-plank.

Already was the derrick lifting the trunks out of the hold and lowering them on deck in a sling that held a dozen at a time, to be slid down an inclined plane to the porters waiting for them. Five minutes after the ship was made fast, the trucks were rolling and rumbling in every direction, distributing the baggage over the pier. The rattle and the roar increased until conversation became difficult, without raising the voice to shrillness.

"I say, now," said Johnny suddenly, to her father, "why shouldn't Esther go? She needn't wait here

for her trunks to be examined, need she? I'll see them through for her."

"I hope you got lots of pretty things," declared Dircks to his daughter.

"I have, indeed," she cried, "though I didn't spend half as much as you wrote."

"But, nevertheless, Miss Esther has nothing dutiable," said Vivian, solemnly.

"Oh no," Esther answered.

"Of course not!" Johnny corroborated. "What a foolish suggestion! Who ever heard of a girl's bringing home anything that was dutiable? Give me your keys, Esther, and I'll smile on the custom-house man for you, and he will be as easy with us as he dares."

Esther demurred a little, but she suffered herself to be persuaded, and her father took her away gladly.

Sartain wanted to go up-town with her, but he felt he had no right to intrude on her first talk with her father after so long an absence. So he walked with them to the cross-town car, and asked if he might not call soon to hear her tell about the good times she had had on the other side.

"I shall be very glad to see you," she said, simply. "Why not come in some Sunday afternoon—next Sunday, if you have no other engagement?"

Sartain had no other engagement, and he promised to present himself on the appointed day. Then he helped her into the car and gave up her little hand-bag, which he had insisted on carrying, and she thanked him pleasantly.

CHAPTER XVIII

On Sunday afternoon Sartain went to Stuyvesant Square, hoping to find Esther alone. In this expectation he was disappointed, for Dircks was sitting before the fire, smoking his corn-cob pipe. The old man had caught cold the morning he waited on the dock, and Esther had forbidden him to leave the house.

Sartain paid a long visit, overjoyed to be again in the same room with Esther. His eye gladdened as he watched her wait on her father, mixing his medicine and putting the tobacco ready to his hand.

She talked about her summer, telling her visitor what she had most enjoyed, describing the pleasant excursions they had made, repeating the memorable sayings of the notabilities they had met. Sartain kept asking questions and leading her on for the sheer delight he took in listening to the modulations of her voice, and in watching the play of expression as she set forth her experiences. Once he was moved to cap her account of a day's trip from Interlaken over the Wengernalp by the story of his own week on foot in the White Mountains when he was in college.

A little later Dircks began to ask Sartain for the latest news in regard to the election, then only ten days distant.

Manhattan was one of the organs of the citizens

who wished to elect a Mayor wholly without regard to his politics and solely with reference to his ability to administer the affairs of New York. The contest was likely to be exceedingly close, and the air was full of rumors of one kind or another. Sartain was broad enough to go behind this mere gossip and to pin his faith on the common-sense of the people. He believed that the cause he advocated was right, and that it was therefore certain to prevail in the long run, even if, by chance, it were defeated in the coming election. Dircks was less confident and more defiant. When the old man's feelings were wrought up, his taciturnity vanished and he became unduly loquacious. Sartain found himself immeshed in a political discussion in which he suspected Esther to be but doubtfully interested. He tried to lead her father away from it, but without success.

At last the young man took his leave. He wanted to tell Esther what it meant to him to have her back again where he could feast his eyes with the sight of her. But he could find no form of words that did not sound fulsome and absurd. His intention died away with a broken word or two, swallowed almost before it was spoken.

On the stoop of the house he met Adams just about to ring the bell.

Sartain knew that the artist had been called to Boston a week before by the serious illness of his mother, and he supposed that this was the reason his rival had not been at the dock to receive Esther on her return.

"Hello!" cried the painter; "you're just the man I wanted to see—at least, seeing you now will save my having to write a letter, and that's money in my pocket

—two cents, at least. My mother's all right again, and I got away from Boston yesterday morning by the bright light. In the afternoon I went to the Vivians', and we've got a grand scheme; and that's what I was going to write you about. Can you chafe?"

"Chafe?" repeated Sartain, in perplexity.

"Chafe—that's what I said," the artist answered. "It's a new pocket-verb of my own. To chafe, to cook on a chafing-dish. It's bound to be accepted, that word is, because it fills a felt want."

"No," the other responded; "I can't chafe—that is to say, I've never tried."

"Then you can try on Election night," said Adams; "that's the scheme. We shall all want to sit up and see the excitement, and find out how the thing goes, and be in at the death. So I'm giving a chafing-dish party at my studio, to celebrate the safe return of the Vivians and Miss Esther here. I'm going in now to ask her and her iconoclastic sire."

When he heard that Esther was to be invited, Sartain accepted promptly.

As it chanced, he did not see her again until they met at the studio on Election night. He called in Stuyvesant Square the next Sunday afternoon only to be told that Esther had gone to Tuxedo from Friday to Monday with the Vivians. It was her father who gave him this information, and who detained him for an hour, discussing the political situation.

On Election day, after Sartain voted, he went forth on a tour of inspection. His own district was in a well-to-do neighborhood, and he wanted to see whether an election could pass off as quietly in the worst parts of New York as here. He went down to Tompkins

Square, and then on to Cherry Hill; and everywhere there was the same orderliness. The silence of the city on that day, when its inhabitants were deciding who should manage its affairs and control its immense revenues, the closed stores, the cessation of business in all the chief thoroughfares, the general air of expectancy—all these things impressed Sartain. It was not until after the polls had closed that he saw the first drunken man. Even at nightfall, when the boys were making all the side streets brilliant with bonfires, it was not often that any one was to be seen under the influence of liquor. That a day so exciting as this should draw to a close without violence or disorder, this seemed to him a proof of the marvellous manner in which America had imposed its political ideals upon a population the half of which had been born under wholly different political conditions.

Standing under the gas-jet, he picked up *Dust and Ashes*, and reread hastily the two or three chapters which described the turmoil of a political campaign. He relished his own writing; it seemed to him pretty good, after all; there were blemishes in it, no doubt, but the excitement of an election was caught not inadequately; the picture he had presented was very like the reality.

In his walk from Irving Place up to the tall building near Thirty-fourth Street where Adams had his studio, Sartain had to thread his way through the throngs that packed the sidewalks of Madison Square, and that surged out here and there into the broad streets, making it difficult for the street-cars to force themselves through the compacting crowd. White screens gleamed aloft, on which magic-lanterns projected the latest re-

turns from all parts of the city. As the triumph of the reform party became more probable, the cheering became more frequent. Although the figures showed that the inhabitants of the city had divided almost equally, the utmost good-nature prevailed. Men on the winning side were chaffing men on the losing side; but there was no bitterness in it, the defeated accepting the result and declaring that their turn would come next, as the city would be sick of reform inside of six months. From the lovely tower of the Madison Square Garden, faint against the deep blue sky, an electric search-light flashed signals to be interpreted many miles away.

After Sartain had emerged from the swaying mob that was shrieking itself hoarse with every set of returns thrown upon the screens, he went on his way uptown. Half-way between Madison Square and Thirty-fourth Street he had to stand aside while a marching club went by, a score or two of young fellows, walking one behind the other, each with his hands on the shoulders of the man before him, and all keeping step to the staccato cry, "We—we—we-got 'm—now!" monotonously reiterated, until the leader gave a sudden signal, and then they all responded with a sky-rocket cheer, which died down with individual and fantastic yells.

Adams's studio was on the top-floor of a large building on a corner of Broadway. The elevator-boy told Sartain at which door to knock, and when he came opposite to it he heard the boisterous laughter of the twins. His shyness returned instantly. Of late he had hoped that he was overcoming it, and even outgrowing it, but in the presence of Mr. Vivian's robust

daughters it always recurred. Now it was only the fact that he had accepted the invitation, combined with the expectation that he would meet Esther, which enabled him to conquer his instinctive desire to run away.

He had to knock three times before any one heard him, and then it was either Dora or Theo who cried "Come in! Oh, come in!"

When he had entered he found the whole party gathered around a table in the centre of the room. At one end of this table sat Mr. Vivian, as carefully dressed as ever and as scrupulously combed, but disfigured now by a huge check apron. He had apples, bananas, celery, and lettuce in plates before him. His three daughters, Esther, and Adams were grouped around him, watching his motions, commenting on them, and tendering advice.

Adams looked up as Sartain entered. "Hsssh!" he cried, "don't say a word. The inventor of the famous 'Vera Cruz Salad' is now engaged in compounding it. Beware how you distract his attention!"

"Never mind their foolishness, Sartain," said Vivian. "What is the latest news?"

"Come, come," interrupted the artist, "business before pleasure! I adjure Sartain not to talk politics until you have finished that salad. Politics is all very fine, but a salad is a serious thing!"

Esther was at one end of the table facing Vivian, and Sartain came forward and stood beside her. She greeted him with her radiant smile, and he was happy at once and willing to stand there silently forever. He gazed around at the studio, which he had never before seen lighted up at night. It was a large room, with

one immense window on the north side. A screen shut off one corner, and from where Sartain stood he could see that all sorts of odds and ends had been heaped up there out of the way. An easel was drawn against the wall near the window, and on this was a vigorously brushed portrait of Vivian; and as Sartain examined this he envied the art of the painter which could thus set a human being before the spectator with a few strokes, bold and simple. On the wall opposite to Sartain was the painting of "Cinderella and the Haughty Sisters," which had come back from the exhibition unsold. Facing this picture was an upright piano with a lighted lamp on it.

Vivian was proceeding steadily with the preparation of his salad. He chopped the celery into little bits; he peeled two or three apples and cut them into little cubes; and he also cut an equal number of little cubes of banana. He decked a broad bowl with the leaves of the lettuce, he mixed the celery, the apple, and the banana together, in the proportion of one-half celery to one-quarter each of apple and banana, and, having mingled them carefully, he heaped them up in the bowl, in the centre of the lettuce. Then he turned to the preparation of the dressing, a mayonnaise, in which the yolks of hard-boiled eggs, olive-oil, white-wine vinegar, salt, mustard, and three kinds of pepper were all artfully proportioned and adroitly commingled. At last he finished beating up the thick, golden liquid, and he poured it cautiously over the ingredients arranged in the broad bowl.

"There!" said the operator; "there is a salad, if you like! What do you say to that?"

"I'm not saying a word," Adams responded. "I

never look a friend's hobby in the mouth. But it is my turn now, and I will show you."

He put the salad-bowl on the top of the piano, by the side of the lamp, and cleared away the plates Vivian had used. He went behind the screen, and returned with his chafing-dish and the ingredients for an oyster-stew.

"Give me that apron," he said. "Really, store-clothes and a boiled shirt are no costume to chafe in. I ought to have worn my overalls."

Johnny helped her father to take off the apron, and then the twins tied it on Adams.

"Um—um," said Theo, "don't those oysters look good?"

"They are so plump," added Dora, "that it would be rank cannibalism for us to eat them."

"And I'm just as sure as sure that he's going to put in butter and crackers and all sorts of fattening things," Theo continued.

"I don't know how it is," Dora went on. "I had a good dinner, and it isn't late—and yet the sight of a chafing-dish makes me hungry at once!"

"The sight of Madams's cooking will take it away again," suggested Johnny.

"That isn't fair," cried Adams, as he began to butter his pan; "your little sisters are healthy, hearty girls, and—"

"Healthy!" interrupted Theo. "Oh, you hateful thing!"

"Hearty!" Dora ejaculated "You've no right to insult us by saying that."

"Just because we are not as thin as Esther, you treat us as if—as if we were pin-cushions," Theo declared.

"And Esther has an excellent appetite—haven't you?" Dora asserted. "You should have seen her eat when she was in Paris."

"Oh, Dora," protested Esther, "you make me feel as if I had been a boa-constrictor."

"Yes," Theo declared, gravely; "if I could have things to eat every day like those we had in Paris, I don't think I should want to die."

"Bah!" Adams interjected, having lighted the lamp under the chafing-dish. "You don't want to die now, do you?"

"Don't we?" Dora responded, promptly.

"Why not?" asked Theo. "Do you know what we did one night last week? I had been awake a long while, and I felt sure Dora was awake too. So I asked her what she was doing, and she had a grand scheme—"

"I was thinking about all the people who would send flowers if we were to die," Dora broke in; "and I told Theo, and she came in my bed, and we found a pencil and a piece of paper. We lighted the gas, and—"

"And we made out a list of everybody who would send flowers," Theo interrupted, "and what they would send. We put you down for a wreath, Madams."

"Quite right," the artist responded, with unwinking gravity; "I always send a wreath when I have been invited to dinner."

"Do you not think you have given us enough of the death's head at the feast?" asked Vivian. "This is not an Egyptian banquet."

Sartain had said nothing. He had listened in silent astonishment. The twins were inexplicable to him always. He could not understand their extravagant

gayety, their morbid fancies, their liking for personalities, their familiarity, which seemed to him almost underbred.

"No," said Adams, "this is not an Egyptian banquet; but it will be a Barmecide feast if this lamp doesn't burn better. I tell you what it is, girls, you mustn't ask me to come and chafe your wedding-breakfast for you."

"It is Cinderella who gets married," Dora retorted, "not the Haughty Sisters."

"It is Cinderella who marries Prince Charming," added Theo, and then they both laughed.

Esther tried to turn their attention. "Cinderella marries the prince, I'll admit," she said, "but don't forget that she found husbands for her sisters—dukes, I think they were, or counts, or something."

"If I were you, I shouldn't want a husband somebody else had found," Johnny suggested; "perhaps the wife who had lost him might offer a reward and get him back."

"All the dukes and counts I hear about nowadays are as poor as crows, and I don't want to get a husband out of the almshouse," said Theo.

"Neither do I," Dora continued, the one playing into the other's hands, as was their custom. "I don't mean to marry for money—I wouldn't do that! But I believe it's just as easy to fall in love with a rich man as a poor man. Don't you, Esther?"

The girl was taken by surprise at being summoned into the conversation thus unexpectedly. "I don't believe in marrying for money, of course," she said, at last, "although I suppose it is a good thing that the man you love should have something of his own.

But if you love him, what does it matter whether he is rich or poor? It's the man you are going to live with, for better or for worse; it isn't the money. If you love him, and he loves you, he would do anything for you and you for him. I don't intend to marry any man until I'm ready to black his boots!"

"That's all very well," Johnny answered, "but you wouldn't have to do that if he were rich enough to wear patent-leathers!"

"I like to hear you girls talking about marriage and giving in marriage," Adams asserted, "just as if there were not more serious things in the world than falling in love. We men don't keep on talking about getting married. Do we, Sartain?"

Thus suddenly addressed, Sartain could only stammer, "I—I—I don't know."

"Well, I don't know about you, either, if it comes to that," Adams answered, as he began to drop the oysters into the chafing-dish. "Maybe some invisible spinster in New England has your affections on cold storage, for all I know. But here in New York I've never seen you go a-girling. Of course, you may have half a dozen co-flirts I've never suspected."

Sartain tugged at the point of his beard and wished that he was quick-witted. He would have liked to turn the tables on Adams sharply, and to get the laugh on him by some unexpected repartee. To do this in the presence of Esther would be doubly gratifying. But he could find nothing at all worthy of the occasion. He thought of retorting that Adams judged others by himself, but this seemed to him unspeakably cheap. And in the end all he said was, "I shall not

condescend to make any defence against such a charge from such a source."

The sound of an approaching brass-band became audible above the chatter of conversation and the rattle in the streets below. Adams was left alone at the table while the rest of the party flocked over to the broad window.

A campaign club was marching down Broadway from its own rooms to the headquarters of the party organization in Twenty-third Street. There were a hundred men walking four abreast, with flags, transparencies, and popping Roman candles. They kept cheering and shrieking, and as they went down the street the crowds on the sidewalks joined in the cheers with hearty good-humor.

"What was the last report as you came by?" Vivian inquired of Sartain.

"The returns show that we have carried the city by anywhere from ten to forty thousand," the young man answered.

"Father will be so glad of that," Esther declared. "He's coming for me. But he was too restless to stay, and he said he'd go down to Madison Square and get the latest news."

As the procession passed on out of sight and out of hearing the twins went back to the table. Mr. Vivian had remained at the window with his eldest daughter and Esther. So had Sartain, who was trying to find some means of separating the girl he loved from the other two, and of having her all to himself for a little chat. But before he had devised a scheme to accomplish this, Vivian had expressed to Esther his belief that her father would make a most effective portrait,

and in a moment more he had led her away to examine his own picture on the easel, and thence across the room to the Cinderella.

Johnny and Sartain were left sitting side by side on the broad lounge before the window. The girl gave him a quizzical look.

"You weren't quick enough," she said. "Papa cut in before you."

Sartain marvelled that she had read his thought thus plainly, and he wondered whether she had discovered with equal perspicuity her father's affection for Esther.

"Yes," he began, "I did want to have a chat with her. You see, it's six months now and more since I've hardly had a chance to talk to her—all to myself."

"And do you want to talk to her all to yourself just as much as you did six months ago?" Johnny asked, looking him full in the face.

"More," he answered, simply—"much more. You see, I love her now more than I did then—although then I didn't think I could do that."

"Oh!" said Johnny, sharply. "You love her more now than ever—and you come and tell me that?"

"I must tell somebody!" he returned.

Johnny sat silent for a moment, her foot impatiently tapping the floor.

"I can't imagine what all you men see in Esther Dircks that's so very attractive," she said, at last. "Of course, she's a nice girl, and a sweet, good girl, and all that—and I love her dearly myself. But you men, you seem to adore her—you and Madams and my fa—"

Then she broke off suddenly, and Sartain knew that

she had detected the secret that her father had not discovered even yet.

"It's about time for Madams to propose to her again," continued Johnny. "What is there about Esther that's so strangely fascinating, I'd like to know."

"How can I tell you?" Sartain answered. "It's herself that is her chief charm, I suppose—her own exquisite personality. And then she looks so fragile, so ethereal—"

"She looks frail enough—just as if she hadn't a bone in her body," Johnny interrupted; "in fact, I used to call her Miss Cartilage—but for all that she isn't to be blown away by a breeze. She has a healthy appetite, Esther has, and she likes clothes, just as other girls do, and she takes mighty good care of that delicate complexion of hers, and she's miserable if she gets sunburnt ever so little. She isn't so very different from the rest of us, I assure you. She knows that her right profile is better than the left; and you just see her now as she's talking to papa—she always turns the best side to a man."

Sartain looked at her in dumfounded astonishment. He could not understand why Johnny should indulge in this outbreak. He could not guess why she should thus attack the girl she had just pretended to love. He was so taken by surprise that he said nothing; and Johnny was able to regain her equanimity.

"I suppose you wonder why I'm telling you all these things?" she asked, with a softening of her voice. Then she laughed lightly. He was looking at Esther as she stood by the side of Vivian at the other end of the room. Her head was turned from side to side,

gracefully, as she discussed the picture; then a wisp of her light-gold hair came down over her eyes, and she raised her hand to thrust it into its place—a gesture that always moved Sartain like a beautiful passage of music.

"Yes," he responded, "I confess I do not perceive your motives."

"My motives?" she repeated, rather scornfully. "Oh, well, my motives will have to take care of themselves—if I have any. What I wanted to do was to bring you down from the skies and make you put your feet on the solid earth. It's here you've got to live, for a little while, anyway, and not in heaven; and that's why it's a good thing Esther's not an angel, but just a woman—a woman like the rest of us, with her fine points of character, and her defects, too."

"I see what you mean," Sartain returned, mollified by her change of tone. "You think that I idealize her too much."

"If I were you, I wouldn't idealize her at all," she retorted. "She's a human being, you see—just as I am. She had a father and a mother—just as you had. She's a woman, with all the failings of a woman—even if she has more than her share of a woman's fascination."

"She is a woman of a thousand," Sartain declared.

"Oh, I'll say she's a woman of a million, if you like," returned Johnny. "All the same, she is a woman, and not a fairy or a nymph or an angel. And if you idealize her too much, it isn't good for either of you, because you are certain to find her out sooner or later. It isn't good for her especially—that is, if you are ever to marry her."

"If I ever marry her!" the young man echoed. "How can I really hope that she will ever marry me?"

"There you go idealizing her again," was the instant response. "Other girls get married now and then—why not Esther Dircks?"

"But why should she ever care for me?" he asked, hoping for encouragement.

"I don't know, I'm sure," Johnny answered, calmly.

"Who am I, that she should ever take a fancy to me?" pursued Sartain. "I'm not rich, I'm not handsome, I'm not famous. What have I got to offer her?"

"Yourself," was the swift reply. "That's all that any man can offer, and it's enough for any girl."

"Oh, Miss Johnny!" ejaculated Sartain.

"I mean what I say," the young woman responded. "I'm no hypocrite. I don't know whether it's hypocrisy that makes men pretend they are not as good as girls are, or whether it's misplaced modesty, or what it is; but it's nonsense, whatever it is—just nonsense! I've no patience with such shallow pretence!"

Sartain listened to this iconoclastic declaration, wondering why it was that one woman liked to run down another, and thinking how acutely Thackeray had been able to reproduce this feminine characteristic.

"I wish I could think myself good enough for Miss Esther," he said, at last.

"Oh, you are incorrigible," cried Johnny, rising to her feet. "You go over to her now, and you'll see that she won't forgive you for having this confidential chat with me."

Sartain stood up. He wanted to repel this insinuation against Esther. But Johnny had left him and

joined her sisters at the table where Adams had just completed half a dozen Welsh-rabbits.

At the call of the host, Vivian escorted Esther to the table. Sartain could not but remark that his manner towards the girl was caressing and yet not in any way offensive. Esther stood by the side of Johnny, while Sartain went to get chairs for them. It surprised him a little to see that they had their arms about each other's waists.

When they were seated, there was no place for him, save at the other end of the table between the twins.

They tasted Adams's oysters and his Welsh-rabbits, they devoured Vivian's Vera Cruz salad, and they drank bottle beer in the pewter mugs that the artist had picked up in Holland. They all talked at once.

Sartain alone said little, and it seemed to him that Esther was treating him with unusual coldness. Generally she was affable and friendly, but at this supper she was chilly and almost haughty. He could not imagine what he might have done to offend her. He was the more grieved at this change of attitude on her part as it was accompanied by a display of greater cordiality towards Adams. As the supper progressed Sartain sank into a moody dissatisfaction with himself, and, indeed, with everybody except her.

He took no notice of the magpie chatter of the twins, and he was hardly conscious when Johnny left the table, sat down at the piano, and played the accompaniment for the latest negro melody, which her sisters sang with full appreciation of its exotic humor.

When this had come to an end, Dora turned to the absorbed lover and said, "You sing us something now, Mr. Sartain."

"That's so," Theo added. "Sing us that love-song —the Arab one, you know. That was splendid!"

"Don't urge Mr. Sartain to sing just after eating," said Johnny.

"But he didn't eat anything at all," Theo retorted.

"And Esther has never heard him sing that song," Dora declared. "Have you, Esther?"

Esther acknowledged that she had not heard it, as she had never been present on any of the occasions when Mr. Sartain had sung it.

Johnny rose from the piano and closed the cover on the keys.

Theo instantly took her place. "I know the accompaniment," she cried, as she began.

"Now, Mr. Sartain," Dora urged.

Sartain looked at Esther, to see if she really wanted to hear him; but she was talking to Mr. Vivian, almost ostentatiously.

Then he decided to sing. He was aware that he had a good voice, uncultivated though it was; and he believed that the Bedouin song was well within its compass. He recalled the words hastily as he took his place beside the piano, and he was pleased at the way in which they expressed his own emotions. He did not think that the Arab lover was more devoted to the object of his affection than he was to Esther; and he had a vague hope she might guess perhaps that he was giving utterance to his own feelings also.

"Are you ready?" asked the girl at the piano. "Then go ahead!"

The Orientalism of the first stanza made the song impersonal, as he sang it; and yet he did not dare to look at Esther. As he reached the refrain, with its

promise of eternal adoration, his eyes happened to fall on Johnny, who was sitting back in an easy-chair in a constrained attitude, as though gripping its arms. Her gaze was fixed; and when Sartain involuntarily followed its direction, he discovered that she was staring intently at Esther, whose head was turned away.

In singing the second stanza, Sartain sympathized fully with the yearning of the lover, and he knew he had never before put so much feeling into his delivery:

"Look from thy window and see
My passion and my pain;
I lie on the sands below,
And I faint in thy disdain.
Let the night-winds touch thy brow
With the heat of my burning sigh,
And melt thee to hear the vow
Of a love that shall not die

"*Till the sun grows cold,*
And the stars are old,
And the leaves of the Judgment Book unfold!"

When the rich barytone notes died away, there was a round of applause. Sartain looked at Esther. She sat still on the lounge, with her head averted, making no sign of approval.

Then Johnny rose to her feet and went over to the window. "This room is positively stifling!" she said. "Can't we have some air?"

Five minutes later there came a knock at the door, and Dircks arrived to take his daughter home, whereupon the party broke up. When Sartain bade Esther good-night, he saw that her eyes were singularly bright, and that there was more color on her cheek than usual.

CHAPTER XIX

After the election, the circulation of *Manhattan* increased for a week or two, and then began to decline. Neither Sartain nor Truax could understand why it was that the paper did not appeal to a larger circle of readers. They had put their heads together and prepared a most alluring series of announcements for the next year; and as this would be expensive, they consulted Dircks, who had hitherto paid the weekly deficit without a murmur.

He listened, transfixing first Truax and then Sartain with a glance from under his immense eyebrows. His fingers were gripping and ungripping the handle of the big cotton umbrella he sometimes carried. He heard them out, and then he asked, "What 'll it cost?"

When he was told, he said, slowly, "That's a sight of money, but I'll risk it, if you say so. I got it now, anyway."

The publisher of the paper pointed out that they might hope to get back in subscriptions before New Year's all they had expended in this Christmas advertising.

"I suppose you might as well have it, sooner or later," was all Dircks answered.

But as he was going out of the door of the office

he stopped on the threshold and turned back to ask, "How much did you say we lost this week?"

Truax gave him the figures.

"I wouldn't mind it," the old man declared, "if you'd only go for these scoundrels harder. Show them up!—that's what the paper's for, ain't it?"

During the last few weeks of the year the sales of *Manhattan* remained stationary; there were fewer subscriptions renewed than Truax expected, and fewer new subscribers. Sartain did what he could to reduce expenses. He wrote all the editorial articles himself, and he also contributed nearly every week one signed article. He was particular not to buy any manuscript, however tempting it might be in theme or in treatment, unless he could use it immediately; and he kept down the stock of accepted contributions as low as he dared.

For the new year he had announced his new serial, *A Wolf at the Door*, as by "S. Francis," the author of *Dust and Ashes*, not having himself acknowledged its authorship; and he began to prepare a series of "Portraits in Black and White," to appear one every week. These he resolved to sign by another pen-name, "Rembrandt Knickerbocker," appropriate to the sharp and etcher-like manner in which he intended to handle certain contemporary notabilities. The first of these chiaroscuro studies of his fellow-citizens was to be devoted to the President of the United States, the second to the Governor of the State, the third to the Mayor of the city; these three officials being disposed of, he meant to consider in turn the chief authors, painters, actors, architects, and sculptors of New York.

Foremost among the men of letters to have their

portraits painted in this series was Vivian; and Sartain set himself conscientiously to re-read all the elder author's books in chronological sequence, that he might trace the development of Vivian's talent. With a surprise that grew as he re-read volume after volume of Vivian's writings, he discovered that he could no longer assign to the elder author so high a place as he had hitherto given him. It came upon him with a certain shock that he had outgrown Vivian, that he had passed beyond the stage in which such writing as Vivian's was to be admired inevitably, and that perhaps, after all, he had been setting too high a value upon Vivian's work. Being modest, he distrusted his own judgment at first, and read on and on, hoping to find reason to return to his earlier estimate. Being honest, he had to ask himself whether his feeling towards the author had not been changed perhaps by his knowledge that the man was attentive to Esther Dircks. But he was forced regretfully to the conclusion that Vivian's work had limitations he had not seen before; it was clever, unfailingly clever, but cleverness itself no longer appealed to him as it did when he was in college; it was shrewd, it was polished, and it was always as careful as possible—and this was perhaps why it now struck Sartain as a little hard in its manner and as somewhat monotonous. It was not superficial, and it was not narrow, certainly; but it did lack depth and breadth. The ingenuity with which the stories were compounded was obvious—perhaps, indeed, it was only too evident; and Sartain saw that, if he were a hostile critic, he would be tempted to call it almost mechanical. Without being a hostile critic, with the utmost friendliness for Vivian, with gratitude towards him for many kind-

nesses received, with a real liking for the man himself, Sartain came sadly to the conclusion that the failing of these novels he had once admired unhesitatingly—the fatal failing, as it seemed to him now—was that they lacked "the ruddy drop of human blood," as Lowell had called it. Their damning defect was the absence from their pages of any convincing portrayal of humanity.

In other ways also those last weeks of the year were a season of doubt and a time of reaction. There was a change in the attitude of Esther Dircks towards him; he did not understand just what it was nor why it should be, but he felt it of a certainty. After the supper in the studio on Election night she was more distant. Her manner had always been friendly, and she had always greeted him as though glad to see him. Sometimes Sartain had felt like resenting this equable friendliness, as less promising towards a lover than an obvious aloofness. But now that the friendliness had chilled, now that the woman he loved apparently preferred that there should be no approach to intimacy, he was really distressed. When he met her at Vivian's, or elsewhere, she was not exactly frigid, but her politeness was decidedly cold; and when he called in Stuyvesant Square, as he did two or three times in the course of November and December, her father happened always to be at home, and she took little part in the conversation. Once, when the talk went back to Election night, she asked him whose the words were of the song he had sung—"that pretty little Oriental lyric."

Reviews of *Dust and Ashes* continued to appear, but they were none of them either very commendatory or very condemnatory; and in time Sartain came to ac-

cept the fact that even if the book should sell fairly well, it had failed absolutely to make the hit he had hoped for. There were none of the outward signs that evidence public interest in a novel, no paragraphs about it in the literary notes of the newspapers, no editorial discussion of its theme, no inquiry as to the personality of the author, with anecdotes of his methods of work, of his boyish precocity, of his dead mother, and of his plans for the future. *Dust and Ashes* had been received as most novels are received, nine-tenths of which live a day and die and leave no trace; and there was nothing in its reception to tempt the author to reveal his identity.

His position as editor of *Manhattan* had greatly increased Sartain's circle of acquaintance in New York. He had been taken to more than one of the fortnightly meetings of the Writers' Club, he had been asked two or three times to the Saturday nights of the Millennium, and he had even been invited to take part in a debate at the Contemporary. Although he was not of a suspicious nature, sometimes he thought he detected in those who made these advances a desire to be on good terms with the editor of a journal like *Manhattan*, which was constantly criticising the doings of its contemporaries.

It was on the last Saturday of the year that he was invited to a luncheon at the Millennium. That very morning, as it chanced, the *Gossip* had published an article on *Dust and Ashes*, which was by far the least favorable Sartain had yet seen. It jeered at the obvious youth of the author, mocked at his enthusiasm, sniffed at his style, and denounced his morality; and it supported some of its assertions by quotations in-

geniously wrenched from their context. As Sartain read it his face flushed as though he had been smitten in a public place. Then he re-read it, and the gross indecency of it revolted him, and its essential dishonesty lay bare before him. Pitiful as it was, and contemptible, it was painful also; and Sartain smiled sadly as he asked himself whether an author who had been thus excoriated ought to venture into the presence of the public.

But he was greeted as though the *Gossip* did not exist. He happened to sit next to the editor of the *Arctic Monthly*, and, while they were smoking, the editor dropped his voice and said that he was very glad to meet Sartain, and that this was no time to talk business, of course, but that he wished Sartain would write him a paper on the government of American cities—for the March number, if he could have it ready then.

Long before the lunch-party left the book lined private dining-room of the Millennium, the equanimity of the young author was fully restored, and he was able to enjoy the good cheer and good talk.

As he came down the broad marble stairs of the sumptuous club-house, Vivian said to him, "Why not walk up-town with me? It's a beautiful afternoon, and you can't have any work to do at the end of the week."

They went to Fifth Avenue and turned up. It was a beautiful afternoon, as Vivian had said—clear, dry, windless—with the sun setting in fiery glory. Sartain recalled his solitary walk up the avenue, more than a year earlier, when he was alone in New York, and was just going to pay his first visit to Vivian. How

many things had happened in those fourteen months! —the meeting with Esther, the editing of *Manhattan*, the publication of *Dust and Ashes*.

The recalling of his novel led him to ask Vivian if he had seen the last *Gossip*.

"I wish I had seen the last of it," was the answer; "it is unworthy to live. But I saw it gave you a good notice this morning, if that is what you mean."

"A good notice?" Sartain repeated. "Why, the savage scalped me!"

Vivian smiled. "It was about two columns long, as I recall it," he said. "What can you ask for more? When you are as old as I am, and when your shelf has as many books on it as mine has, then you will know that a review is good in proportion to its length. Whether it contains praise or blame is of little importance—that is only one man's opinion. Of course, the praise is pleasanter; but the blame, however bitter, is better than nothing at all. What is really significant is the length of the article; that measures the angle the book subtends in the public eye."

"I see what you mean," Sartain admitted; "but I am not callous yet."

"And I am not either," the other confessed, frankly, "for all that I am twice your age, and have had many more books killed under me. It was a counsel of perfection I was giving you. Of course, the insult hurts."

They walked on in silence for a few paces, and then Vivian resumed:

"I have often thought that some authors are like the crocodile that hides its eggs in the sand and never cares what becomes of them; while some other writers

are devoted parents, who bring up their offspring by hand and sit up with it all night, and sometimes find it hard to carry it through the second summer. Really, it does not matter which course you choose; the neglected egg may hatch out a masterpiece, and the cherished babe may die in its cradle. Time alone can decide; we authors are powerless, and powerless are the reviewers also—fortunately. Just now it seems to me that most of those who write about books in the newspapers are old fogies who think literature died with Sir Walter, or else fresh young men who think it was born with Stevenson."

"There are more of the pert youngsters, I guess," Sartain declared, "if I can judge from the notices of my own book. Even when they are kindly—and they are mostly kindly—they reveal their own inability to understand and to appreciate."

"Yes," said the elder novelist, "they cannot help showing the natural contempt clever and ignorant young men have for their elders and betters. And yet I have no reason to complain; it is very rare that I myself am not treated with courtesy nowadays. I fancy that is one of the benefits of growing old; they pay me the respect due to age."

Sartain noticed how briskly Vivian walked and how firmly, and he was surprised when the other turned to him.

"I suppose the end of the year is not a melancholy season to you," he said. "It is to me. Every December now I have to count the friends and acquaintances who have fallen by the wayside at one or another of the twelve mile-stones. When I meet a man I knew twenty or thirty years ago, I want to shake hands

heartily and ask him to dinner. I think of getting up a club to dine together on the last day of the year, and to be called 'The Survivors.'"

Sartain was surprised at the sadness in Vivian's voice. It was a bright day, and the young man looked forward to many years of delightful work.

"I do not know why you should be melancholy," he said, at last. "You are a successful man—"

"Am I?" interrupted Vivian. "I am a lucky man —that I know; and I have had far more than my share of the good things of life—health and friends and the use of money, and all that. I have been far happier than I deserve, if I really deserved happiness at all—and that is a point on which I refuse to commit myself. But successful? Have I been successful?"

Sartain did not know what answer to make to this personal appeal.

"Since I have begun to talk to you in this confidential way," Vivian continued, "I might as well go on and have my say out. I have never confessed it before to anybody, and I cannot see why I should to you, but I do not think that I can fairly be called a successful author."

Sartain was about to protest and to ask for an explanation when Vivian went on.

"I know what you would say. I place all that I write in the great magazines and I get the best prices. That is true enough, so far as it goes. But my books do not sell. I mean by that, that I have never written a really popular novel. Now and then a story of mine has slowly crawled up to a sale of eight or nine thousand copies, and there it sticks. Yet a sale of

perhaps fifty thousand copies is quite possible, without breaking through the crust."

"Breaking through the crust?" echoed Sartain.

"What I mean is this," Vivian explained. "Any novel published by a well-established house ought to sell a thousand or two copies, and if the author is also well established it may sell ten thousand. The reading circle in the United States is large enough to absorb anywhere from twenty to fifty thousand of any book it likes. But beyond fifty thousand it is hardly possible to push a book. Yet if a novel happens to break through the crust and to get outside of the circumference of the reading circle, which is more or less literary, if it gets into circulation among the non-literary outside public, then there is no guessing how many copies of it may be sold, for the outside market contains nearly seventy millions of people. Now I should have liked to write one book that really reached my fellow-citizens—that had a sale of a hundred thousand or so. I never have written it, and I suppose that now I never shall."

He paused, and Sartain felt that he was expected to offer some consolation. His honesty forbade, and he kept silent.

"Of course, I do not blame the public, for not rushing to buy my wares," Vivian resumed; "the public knows what it wants, and it knows that it does not want my books. Of course, I never tried to guess at the public taste, and to write a story in accord with my guess. I have written always to please myself—I have written what I wanted to write. After all, I have had my reward in the joy of my work."

Here Sartain was ready to agree with him. "I'm

glad to hear you say that," he said; "so many authors complain of the strain and struggle of composition."

"Either they are insincere," Vivian declared, "or they are working against the grain, and their work is probably worthless. There is no joy equal to the craftsman's when he is doing his best. Sometimes I have wondered why we should ever get paid for writing; it is such fun that we ought to be made to buy the privilege. Nobody who reads a story of mine can get a tithe of the pleasure out of it I had in its creation."

"And do your characters take the bit in their teeth," asked the younger novelist, "and run away from you, and make love to each other and patch up marriages you disapprove of, while you toil after them breathless and happy?"

"They are a most independent and arbitrary lot, those children of our fancy," Vivian responded, as they crossed the Plaza and turned down Fifty-ninth Street. "And we love them dearly and never dare to disinherit them. I wish the public would only take half the interest in my lovers and in their quarrels and reconciliations that I do."

Sartain left Vivian at the door of the great apartment-house that overlooked Central Park, after declining a pressing invitation to come up for a smoke. As he walked down Fifth Avenue alone in the twilight, now swiftly shutting in on the city, while the electric lights twinkled ahead of him, he went over all that Vivian had said to him. After a while he began to see that perhaps the reason why Vivian's works had not laid hold of people's hearts was because Vivian was an artist only, and because he was a happy man.

Vivian had not learned in sorrow what he told in story; he had never sounded the depths of emotion or climbed the heights of sorrow. Then, with his habit of making a personal application to himself, Sartain asked whether or not his own literary future depended on a tragedy in his life, whether or not the price of the triumph of his literary ambition might not be the failure of his wooing of Esther Dircks. He faced the dilemma boldly, and he knew what choice he would make should the devil proffer it. He would sooner fail ignominiously, if he might marry Esther, rather than succeed gloriously without her.

CHAPTER XX

So the old year drew to an end and passed away, and a new year came, with fresh hopes, high anticipation, and lofty resolutions. It brought no change for the better to the journal that Sartain edited. In the first number of the new volume appeared the opening instalment of *A Wolf at the Door*. In spite of this attraction, the circulation of *Manhattan* remained stagnant; now and then it rose a little, but more often than not it fell. Both editor and publisher were as economical as they dared to be, and yet the weekly deficit did not diminish.

A Wolf at the Door was published in brief instalments, a single chapter at a time, and the heroine, although glimpsed fitfully in the earlier parts, did not really appear on the stage of the story until the fifth or sixth part. It was only in the seventh chapter that her personal appearance was described at length, and this was not published in *Manhattan* until nearly the end of February.

In the two months he had seen Esther as often as he could; sometimes on Saturday at the Vivians', sometimes on Sunday at her father's, sometimes during the week at a private view, a concert, or a meeting of the Contemporary. The last Sunday in February was the first since the heroine of *A Wolf at the Door* had made

her appearance, and Sartain went to Stuyvesant Square that afternoon hoping that she had read his story, and that she would see in it the evidence of the devotion he felt for her.

As he was about to ring the bell, the door opened and Dircks came out. "It's you," the old man said, as he shook hands with Sartain. "Esther's in. Mr. Adams is visiting with her. I come out for air. I got to walk, or I presume likely I'll choke."

The young man saw that Dircks was not looking well; he was thinner, and his clothes now hung about his huge frame more loosely than ever. He was wilder in his manner also, less ponderous, more brusque. Even the external benignity Sartain had been struck by when he first beheld the engraver was disappearing. There, as he stood on the stoop, Dircks seemed almost fierce; he was a little like a great wild beast going forth from his lair for a prowl.

"You are not feeling ill, are you?" Sartain asked.

"I don't know what it is to be sick," Dircks answered. "I 'ain't never lost a day by sickness."

His tones were a little defiant, and so was his whole manner. Again Sartain remarked how very white the old man's eyeballs were, and how very black the pupils. The beetling eyebrows were bent as Dircks gazed at him fixedly, and no longer were they in contradiction with his other features, the general impression of which had been kindly hitherto.

"Perhaps you are a little tired," suggested Sartain. "Have you been working too hard?"

"I 'ain't worked at all this week," Dircks replied. "There wa'n't any work to do. 'Tain't often there is, now."

"I hope you are not worrying about the loss on the paper," Sartain began, seized by a sudden impulse to sacrifice himself to the comfort of her father.

"Money don't worry me," Dircks answered, with a growl.

"Because, if you were," the editor continued, "maybe we can cut down the expenses a little all round. I guess Truax would take a shave off his salary, and I'm quite ready to have mine reduced to — well, to half what it is—if—if that's the best thing to do."

"'Tain't the best thing," the old man responded. "I know better. If you got a willing ox, and you want to work him hard, you got to feed him."

"But so long as the paper is losing money," Sartain urged, "I—"

"No use talking," Dircks declared, with emphasis. "You take money when you can get it."

"Oh, you mean I had best draw my full salary?" he asked. "Of course, if you think I had better, I—I—"

"Did you ever read the Bible?" asked Dircks, facing Sartain, menacingly.

The young man confessed that he was familiar with the Bible.

"Then you know that piece about Lazarus," Dircks continued. "First off, he sat at the rich man's gate and he was hungry. Now, no man knows what that is if he 'ain't been hungry himself. Last of all, Lazarus, he goes to heaven, and the rich man he goes to torment. Now, that's right—that's gospel truth. That's the rich man's place—in torment—that's where it is! The poor man, he got his torment here in this world."

Sartain was puzzled to understand the exact bearing of this outburst.

"That's why I tell you," Dircks resumed, "you get money when you can. You get it from me—that don't matter any. I never could keep it, anyhow."

Then he shook hands again with the young man and bade him go up-stairs, where Esther would be glad to see him.

He had left the door of the house open behind him, and Sartain entered. He groped his way up the stairs, always dark on a winter afternoon. As he came towards the door of the Dircks's parlor he heard Adams's voice, unusually plaintive in its tone, he thought, although he did not catch the words. Just as he was about to knock he heard Esther's voice answering Adams's, and this time Sartain could not help hearing what she was saying.

"No, no, no," she declared, with gentle emphasis. "I can't. I've told you so before, and—"

Then there was a sudden silence after Sartain's rap. Esther was startled by its unexpectedness. "Oh!" she cried, and, after a moment's hesitation, she added, "Come in!"

When he entered the room he found Esther seated in the arm-chair near the window, while Adams was standing by the fireplace in a constrained attitude. It struck the new-comer that the girl was ill at ease also. With feminine adaptability, she recovered her self-possession more rapidly than the painter, who stood scowling blackly at the new-comer, as though resenting the interruption.

Esther smiled at Sartain, and held out her hand.

"Do you know, your knock really took me so by surprise I almost jumped," she said.

"I ought to explain how it was I didn't ring," he

returned. "It was your father. I met him at the door, and we had a little chat, and he told me to come right up. I'm sorry I was so inconsiderate. I might have known better. I—I beg your pardon."

"It's absurd for me to be so nervous," she responded, with an assumption of liveliness.

"It isn't," broke in Adams, gruffly, as though exaggerating his ill-humor to hide it. "Sartain ought to proffer an apology in writing." As he said this he ruffled up his curly hair with an automatic gesture.

Then Sartain guessed what it was that he had done, and the awkwardness of the situation was made plain to him. He wished that he had come a little earlier or a little later; he regretted that he had come at all; he blushed scarlet as he perceived the indelicacy of his intrusion at such a moment. He stood there still and tongue-tied, hoping that neither of the others would suspect that he had divined the cause of their constraint.

There was a self-conscious silence for half a minute, as though no one knew exactly what ought to be said, and hoped that one of the others would speak first. Then both Esther and Sartain began at once.

Sartain discovered that he had not greeted Adams yet, and what he said was, "How are you? How are you?"

Esther observed that both of the men were standing. "Why don't you two sit down?" she cried. "It makes me so tired to see people on their feet all the time."

Sartain took his place on the settee facing the mantel-piece, and Adams acknowledged his greeting by saying, "How are you? I'm all right."

Then the artist straightened himself and took the authorized position of a man standing before a fire with his hands behind him. "Why should I sit down?" he asked. "I'm as happy here as a Roman fisherman in Lent."

"How did you think father was looking to-day?" asked Esther, turning to Sartain.

"Well," he replied, trying not to alarm her, "I have seen him looking better, I think."

"I'm really very much worried about him," she returned. "I don't know what has come over him. I've never seen him so before. He is restless now, and he seems anxious all the time. He tells me he isn't fretting about anything; but he does not sleep well, and he eats scarcely anything."

"Perhaps he has been working too hard," suggested Adams, in a more natural tone.

"Yes," she answered; "he has shut himself up in his workshop there more than ever lately; and what is very curious is that he doesn't show me what he has been doing. He used to, always. He liked to let me help him pull a proof, and he wanted my opinion. Now I don't know just what it is he has been working at."

Sartain remembered that Dircks had just told him there was little or no work to be had now.

"I don't suppose it's counterfeit money he's making in there," Adams suggested, with a certain bravado in his manner, as though he was quite aware that he was talking for effect.

"Oh, Mr. Adams!" protested Esther.

"I said I didn't suppose it was," the artist explained, "not but what counterfeiting is as honorable a means of making money as many others that are tolerated."

"I expect to find you defending highway-robbery next," she retorted.

"I am willing to admit that the burglar's calling has many alluring characteristics," said Adams. "On the whole, however, it is not so intellectual a craft as the detective's, is it? That is why I think I should make an ideal detective—it's because of my alert intelligence. I believe I should be about as hard to deceive as a Scottish-American Jew, if such a monstrous entity could exist. Zekiel McLevi would be his name, of course."

Esther and Sartain laughed at this, as they were expected to do; and artificial as Adams's talk was, it served to relieve the strain they all felt.

The editor saw two or three numbers of *Manhattan* on the table at Esther's elbow; and he was glad to think that, perhaps, just before Adams had arrived, she had been reading about herself as she was described in *A Wolf at the Door*.

"I see you keep up with the best literature of the day," he said, jestingly, as he indicated the *Manhattan*.

"Generally I do," she answered; "but I have been so busy the past month I haven't had time even to read the morning paper."

Sartain was deeply disappointed, but he could not pursue the subject.

"Do you call that a good newspaper of yours?" asked Adams.

"Don't you?" was Sartain's response.

"Well," said the artist with the deliberation which indicated to those who knew him well that he was fitting a shaft to his bow, "I suppose it is a pretty good newspaper, if you believe that no news is good news."

"If that gets into circulation," retorted the editor, laughing, "I shall have to suborn an art critic to abuse the next picture you exhibit."

"Then I should heap coals of fire on your head," Adams replied. "I'd buy a copy, and double your circulation!"

As though pleased with this thrust, and willing to let it be the climax, he left his place before the fire and went towards Esther.

"I can't waste my afternoon scattering diamonds and rubies for you all the time," he said. "I've got an engagement at the club at five."

"You can't better that last cut," Esther told him, as she gave him her hand.

"Oh yes, I can," he declared, "if I had time. You don't know what I can do in that way when I give my mind up to it."

When he had gone, Sartain hoped for a pleasant talk with Esther. But the conversation soon took a turn he did not like. She insisted upon discussing the Vivians, chiefly the father and the elder daughter. She went out of her way to praise Johnny, asserting that she had come to know the girl better during their summer in Europe, and assuring him that she was really very womanly, in spite of her little mannish assumptions.

Esther's laudation of another woman, whom Sartain did not care for, rather annoyed him. When he was alone with the girl he wanted to talk about himself, or to have her talk about herself. He enjoyed any exchange of confidence, as a proof of their increasing intimacy. One of Esther's remarks led him to suspect that she thought he had sung the Bedouin song for Johnny's special benefit; and he would have liked to

explain at once that he had sung for her alone, that it was the thought of her which had charged his voice with emotion, that it was to her he had addressed that burning lyric appeal. He was tempted almost beyond resistance to drop on his knees there at her feet now to tell her that he adored her, and that he had loved her since the first day he had seen her.

The excess of his feelings interfered again with the clearness of his speech. He cut off one sentence short, and ended another with a straggling word or two.

Then Esther left Johnny for a while and began to praise Mr. Vivian. She declared that nobody could have been kinder than he was while they were in Europe, or more considerate, and that often he thought of her comfort, and of what she wanted, before he thought of his own daughters.

Sartain's jealousy blazed high as she commended the man whom he knew to be a most dangerous rival.

"Well," he suggested, "he is old enough to be your father."

"But he doesn't look it, does he?" she returned.

"I don't know how old he is, really," Sartain admitted, "but it did not surprise me to find that he had a daughter as old as Miss Joan."

"If he does look older than he is," said the girl, shifting her ground, "it's not to be wondered at, considering what he has gone through."

"I thought he had led a very calm life," Sartain returned—"the placid career of a successful man of letters."

"But he was in the war, too," she replied. "And the sights of that dreadful time would be enough to age anybody, I'm sure."

"I remember now that he was in the army," he acknowledged. "He looks so little like a soldier that I had forgotten it."

"And do you know how it was he came to be a soldier?" she asked. "That's the finest thing I ever heard of. He was a young man when the war broke out, and he was alone in Europe, and in those days he was very poor—"

"It was his wife who had the fortune, I believe," said Sartain, a little maliciously.

"He wasn't married then," she resumed, "and, as I said, he was very, very poor. He wanted to come home at once and enlist, but he hadn't any money. So he shipped as a common sailor at Marseilles, and he came back that way—before the mast, you call it, don't you?"

Sartain had no hesitation in acknowledging that this was really a fine thing to do. He wondered how it was that he had never heard of it.

"Oh, Mr. Vivian never talks about it," she cried. "It was Johnny who told me. Johnny is perfectly devoted to her father. You must get her to tell you all about it some day."

He wanted to be able to assure her that he would rather hear even bad news from her than the best of good tidings from Johnny. He remarked the animation in her face as she spoke of Johnny, and the intensity of her expression. He saw that the one little vagabond wisp of her ashen-gold hair had escaped again, and he waited for the easy gesture with which she replaced it.

"Johnny was just like an elder sister to me," she said, "during all those months when I was away with

them. Nobody could have been nicer. I love her dearly."

Then Sartain recalled the conversation with Johnny, in which she had wondered what it was that made Esther so fascinating, and in which she had said that she loved Esther dearly.

He stayed there for half an hour longer, in spite of the fact that Esther persisted in talking about the Vivians. Even when he got up to go at last, he stood for ten minutes with his hand on the handle of the door, while they discussed the taste and the richness with which the Vivians' apartment was furnished.

Sartain confessed that he was very sensitive to the influence of unaccustomed surroundings, and that the delicacy of the furniture and the general air of luxury which enveloped him the first time he called there had made him feel out of place, as though he were of clay too coarse to be a fit associate for people used to things of that sort. And then Esther admitted that she too had been impressed in much the same way. Upon this sympathy, under novel circumstances, their talk flowed on with more warmth than before, until she again praised Johnny, and then he took his leave at last.

He strode away from the house in Stuyvesant Square in a warmish rain, soft and gentle as though it knew itself to be a forerunner of spring. Passion was strong in his veins, and he had almost a physical ache from its tension. It was the love of Esther Dircks that he wanted with all the force of his nature—her love, and not her friendship. And he saw clearly that it was her friendship only that she was proffering him.

While he walked away in the soothing rain, ready

to take all nature to witness the strength of his passion, he could not guess that he had left her thrilling with the touch of his hand as he bade her farewell, and that all unconsciously she was longing for the clasp of his arm about her, or for any masculine advance that would assure her of his love—of the love that she thought was another's. He could not suspect that she sat down where he had been sitting because he had sat there, or that she should remember that he had held the door-knob in his hand for the final minutes of their talk, and that therefore, after a virginal glance around, to make sure no one could see her, she had stooped and kissed it once and again.

CHAPTER XXI

About the middle of March there was a strike of the street-car employees of a city near to New York; and in this struggle the inhabitants of the metropolis took the liveliest interest. Exactly what the merits of the contest might be, it was difficult to declare. In the main, the sympathy of the public was with the strikers, especially in the beginning, and there was a general expectation that the company would submit the matter to arbitration. But in interviews and in letters to the newspapers the president of the street-railroad asserted that the company proposed to manage its own business, that, its employees having thrown up their engagements, the places were now vacant, and that the officials intended at once to replace the old men with new.

For the first two or three days the cars did not run, and the public put up with the inconvenience with but little grumbling, hoping for a speedy settlement in favor of the employees. Then the new drivers and conductors were sent out at long intervals, and were jeered at from the sidewalks and insulted at the corners. When more and more cars began to appear, the strikers could not stand by in patience and see newcomers snatching the bread out of their mouths. The green hands were stoned at first from a distance; then

they were knocked off the platforms and kicked and beaten. After a long delay the city authorities granted police protection to the new men, and two and three and four officers rode on every car that went out of the stables. As the number of cars increased, so did the animosity of the men who had left the company's employ; and in their overt acts they were joined by all the roughs and toughs that lurk in the holes and corners of a city nowadays, ready always to break the law, with no choice as to the law they are ready to break. Before the end of the second week of the strike there had been five deaths by violence; one of these was charged against the police, and four against the strikers, or those acting in their behalf. The sympathies of the public changed about; the National Guard was ordered out, and everybody who was familiar with the course of similar contests knew that the end was near and that the strikers would have to accept the inevitable.

Sartain was keenly interested in the struggle. He investigated personally, and satisfied himself that the conduct of the company had been indefensible, and that the claims of the men, although overstated by them, were supported by the facts. He wrote two editorial articles for the next number of *Manhattan*. One called for a special committee from the Legislature at Albany to investigate the actual cost of the street-railroads, as a basis for their future expropriation by the city, the grantor of the franchises which made them valuable. The other was a declaration of the supremacy of the law, and an assertion that order must be maintained at any cost; it justified the use of the police and the militia to protect the property and the

new employees of the company; and it urged the strikers to refrain from the outrages which could bring only discredit upon their cause.

Manhattan was published on Thursday morning, and it went to press the day before. Sartain was methodical and regular; he tried to complete the make-up as early as he could on Wednesday morning, and generally he managed to order the paper to press before noon. He had done so on the day when he had made up *Manhattan* with the articles inspired by the street-car strike; but when he returned from his luncheon he found Dircks awaiting him in conversation with Truax.

"I'm very glad you've come back at last, Frank," cried the publisher. "I'm trying to get Mr. Dircks here to listen to reason."

"What's the matter?" Sartain asked.

"He wants us to back up those rioters," Truax explained; "to stick to them through thick and thin, even if they are killing people every day."

"Well," returned the editor, "what did you say to that?"

"I was telling him that it's no good our supporting the strikers," Truax went on. "There's no money in that for us, is there? They won't buy a copy, no matter how much we praise them. *Manhattan* is a ten-cent paper, and car-drivers have no use for it."

"I didn't know we had this paper just to praise people who had ten cents to buy it," said Dircks, with feeling. "I thought we had this paper to help the poor man."

Sartain saw that the old man was excited, as though the restlessness of the past few weeks had now come to a climax. The large hairy hand grasped the um-

brella with fingers that opened and shut nervously. The white of the old man's eyes seemed whiter than ever before, and the pupils were blacker and more fiery. The protruding thatch of the great eyebrows came down low as he bent his penetrating gaze on the publisher and then on the editor.

"That's what I thought, too," Sartain replied; "*Manhattan* is to tell the truth and shame the devil. It is to stand up for the down-trodden, and it is to denounce the grasping wickedness of the fraudulent money-makers. But it is to be honest to its own convictions first of all, isn't it? It is to be honest with itself."

Dircks listened to him in silence, only to repeat, "Honest? Honest? What do you mean by honest?"

"I mean that we must be as fair to the rich man as the poor man," Sartain returned. "What is sauce for the goose ought to be sauce for the gander, oughtn't it? If we attack the robber barons because they set themselves above the law, we must also call the strikers to order when they put themselves outside the law. That's fair, isn't it?"

"What's fair?" asked Dircks, raising his voice. "For the soldiers to shoot a man down in the street?"

"But the man would not be shot," urged Sartain, "if he were not engaged in assaulting another man."

"Another man?" Dircks retorted. "Do you call a scab a man? It's a scab he's kicking. No decent man would be a scab, would he?"

"A decent man may be so desperately hard up that he is ready to do anything to get bread for his children," Sartain answered.

"The fellow that's willing to keep another man's

job," said Dircks, shrilly, "he's too good to be kicked; he ought to be killed; he deserves all he gets!"

Sartain was taken aback by this extreme vehemence.

"But, Mr. Dircks," he responded, "this is a free country, after all, and a man has a right to work for low wages if he chooses. If he would sooner be paid badly than not paid at all, I don't see what we can do. As fast as we can we've got to change the conditions that allow some men to roll in riches while other men are let down to the starvation level. But until we can advance civilization that far, I don't see what right we have to prevent any man's working for any wages he is willing to accept. These strikers say that they can't live on what they are getting, and they quit; that's all right. These other men say that they are very glad to take what the strikers reject; that's a pity; but we can't interfere, can we?"

The old man had listened to Sartain impatiently, and now he broke forth strenuously: "We don't need to interfere. We got only to keep our hands off. The strikers, they'll settle the scabs quick enough, if we let 'em alone!"

"But surely you would not allow men to be murdered in the street, would you?" cried the editor.

"There wouldn't be any murdering if the police wa'n't there," the old man answered. "There ain't a scab would dare to come out."

"It seems to me the scabs have rights, too," Sartain urged. "They are men, after all; they have wives and children, and—"

"Then why don't they let another man's job alone?" interrupted Dircks. "That's easy enough, ain't it? I know it's hard for the man whose job is taken away.

You don't know. I do. You 'ain't gone through that. I have. You 'ain't seen your women folks hungry. I have. You don't know."

"No," admitted Sartain. "I have had no personal experience. No doubt, it is hard—"

"Hard?" broke in Dircks. "Hard? I saw my wife die! She died because I didn't have money! That would have saved her life, the doctor said. I hadn't got it. Why should other men have money to buy the lives of their wives and their children, and I not have it? That's what I want to know. She died, and money would have saved her, and I knew it, and she knew it. If I could have stolen it, of course I'd done it; but I hadn't the chance then. When she wanted what money could buy, there wa'n't nobody had a better right to it than she had. That's what I say! And when she died, because I couldn't get money to take her South, then I quit praying. What good was God to me? He let my wife die, and he give men in Wall Street millions and millions."

To this outbreak neither Sartain nor Truax could make any appropriate answer. Sartain especially was pained by the violence of the old man's speech; he was thinking of Esther.

After a silence which seemed very long to the two others, Dircks continued in a little lower key, but with his voice still revealing his intense excitement.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" he asked.

"About what?" returned Sartain.

"What are you going to say about this shooting down men?" he cried. "What kind of a piece are you going to put in the paper?"

"I have written two articles," the editor explained; "one suggesting that the city should take possession of the road, paying only what its real value is, less the value of the franchise fraudulently acquired—"

"That's good," agreed Dircks; "the city ought to take it, but it hadn't ought to pay a cent for it!"

"And then I have a second article," said Sartain, "regretting that the company has refused to arbitrate, and declaring that it is now the duty of all good citizens to see that order is restored and the supremacy of the law maintained."

"That means you're on the side of the police and the soldiers?" asked Dircks, slowly and in a lower voice.

"If you put it that way," the editor admitted. "I suppose that is what it does mean. *Manhattan* is on the side of law and order—"

"Law and order!" repeated Dircks, with contemptuous hostility. "Law and order! I know what law is. There ain't anybody knows that better than I do. When I was in the army, I was paymaster for a while, and the rebels got my money away from me, and I couldn't prove it—and the law said I was a thief!"

This, then, was the mystery which had hung over Dircks's career in the army; this was why he took no part in the gatherings of his former comrades; this was why he refused to talk over even with his daughter his experiences during the war. Ordinarily Sartain was not swift to see all the bearings of a statement; but now he perceived at once that he had hold of the cause of many of the peculiarities of Esther's father hitherto inexplicable.

"It ain't no wonder I 'ain't no high idea of the law,"

Dircks went on. "I 'ain't any better opinion of the law than the law had of me. I got no call to fight for the law. If it's the law that's keeping the man whose job is taken away from killing the scab that took it, if it's the law that's doing that kind of dirty work, so much the worse for the law. It ain't the first time the law has come down heavy on a good man, nor the second, neither. I know what the law is. I suffered the law myself."

Truax tried to relieve the tension by an ill-timed jest.

"Mr. Dircks," he suggested, "I guess you are a little like that newly landed Irishman who wanted to know whether we had a government here, because if we had he was agin it."

"What has the government done for me?" the old man retorted. "Wa'n't it the government made the law that called me a thief? Wa'n't it the government let men in Wall Street have millions and millions when I hadn't a hundred dollars to buy my wife's life?"

It seemed to Sartain that Dircks was really getting more and more excited as the discussion continued, and that the sooner it could be brought to an end the better.

"I am very sorry that we don't agree better about these things," he began. "I don't defend our present social organization as an ideal system—I know well enough that it is full of defects; but, on the other hand, I think that progress is possible only along legal lines, and—"

"And you have put a piece in the paper saying the police and the soldiers ought to shoot men down in the streets?" Dircks broke in. "Is that printed yet?"

"No," Sartain answered. "It is not printed yet—but I have sent the forms to the press."

"Then you can stop it now?" the old man inquired, eagerly.

"Yes," Sartain responded. "I could stop it now—if I wished to do so."

"Will you stop it?" Dircks asked. "Will you take it out, and stand up for the men whose jobs are taken away?"

"Mr. Dircks, I would like to meet your views," said the young editor, slowly and seriously. "But I can't."

"You can't?" almost shrieked Dircks, rising to his feet. "Why not?"

"Because in that article I have said what I thought I ought to say, and because I have not changed my opinion since I wrote it," was the firm response.

The old man stepped forward. "'Tain't your money that's been spent on the paper."

Sartain stood up and faced him.

"It is your money, I know," he said; "but it was clearly understood that I was to be responsible for the editorial opinions."

"Then you won't change it?" the old man asked, harshly, with his great eyes piercing the other from under his overhanging eyebrows.

"I can't," was the young man's answer, as he faced the fierce gaze of the father of the woman he loved.

There was silence while the two men stood there looking into each other's eyes.

"I guess it's better to be on the side of the law-makers than the law-breakers," said Truax, again endeavoring to relieve the tension.

Finally Sartain made a swift resolution. He swallowed once or twice, and then he said, "The paper is yours, Mr. Dircks—I don't deny it. So long as I am editor, I must write what I think. But if you disapprove of what I write, there is no reason why I should be editor any longer. I am ready to resign the position at any time—now, if you wish it."

The old man continued to look at him while he was taking in this suggestion; and there was another silence, which Truax did not break.

"Resign?" said Dircks, at last. "Resign? What for?"

"So that you can put another editor in my place," Sartain replied; "somebody who will be more in accord with you."

"'Tain't no good resigning," the old man returned. "'Tain't no use of talking of somebody else. The paper's got to stop, that's all!"

"Got to stop!" echoed both the editor and the publisher.

"It's got to stop," repeated Dircks. "That's what I said."

"Why?" asked Sartain.

"Why?" the old man repeated again, as he picked up his hat. "Because the money's all gone. That's why. I can't pay after this week, any way."

"What are we to do?" cried Truax.

"You do what you did before I started in," Dircks returned. "You can't get the police and the soldiers to make me pay out, week after week, when I got no more money—can you? You can't get the law to call me a thief again, because I quit when I got through—can you?"

With these pointed questions Dircks made his way towards the door.

"Hold on a minute," Sartain requested.

"Well?" said the old man, halting on the threshold, a pitiful figure, so he seemed to Sartain, with the clothes hanging on his tall, shrunken frame.

"This is your final word, then?" the young editor asked. "You have no more money to spend on *Manhattan*, and you want it stopped?"

"I don't want it stopped," was the answer. "I don't care what you do with it now. I'm through with it. And if I had money, I wouldn't put a cent more into a paper that stood up for law."

"But there are articles on hand that are paid for, and there are advertising accounts to be collected—are there not?" and the editor appealed to the publisher.

"Lots of 'em," was Truax's prompt reply.

"Then let me try and sell the paper for you," urged Sartain. "Perhaps I can get a fair price for it. Perhaps I can get you back some of the money you have lost in it."

"I don't care what you do with it," Dircks answered, as he walked slowly out of the office.

Sartain and Truax looked at each other in silence for a moment, and then the latter laughed.

"This is perfectly ridiculous," he quoted, and then laughed again.

"It's hard on you, old man," said Sartain, laying his hand on the other's shoulder. "I feel as if I had brought you East under false pretences."

"Don't you worry about me," was the answer. "I've got nine lives, and I drop on my feet every time. I

didn't tell you before, but there's a new man bought the *Upper Ten*, and he wants me to join him. Of course, I wasn't thinking of leaving you, but if *Manhattan's* going up, I might as well go over to the *Upper Ten*. He's to clean out the gang they have on it now, and make a decent paper of it."

Sartain could think quickly sometimes. "Why shouldn't he buy *Manhattan*, too, and consolidate it with the *Upper Ten?*" he asked.

"That's so," said Truax. "Why not? Shall I go and see him and drop a hint or two that perhaps *Manhattan* could be purchased?"

This was agreed upon, and Truax took his hat at once and started off down-town.

Sartain did not worry about his own prospects. He had saved money, and he knew that he had raised his reputation as a trustworthy literary workman. He did not believe it would be long before something would be secured by an energetic young man, who had prepared a successful subscription book for Carington & Company, who had edited *Manhattan* and immensely improved it, and who had written *Dust and Ashes* and *A Wolf at the Door*. Perhaps he might even join the staff of the reorganized *Upper Ten*. What did depress his spirits was the knowledge that Dircks had lost all the money he had in the paper the young man had edited. Sartain had done his best; and none the less did he feel in some measure responsible. He wished he had ascertained before they went into this journalistic venture just how much money it was the old man had.

CHAPTER XXII

THE next day *Manhattan* appeared as usual; and Truax reported to Sartain that he thought he could tempt the new owner of the *Upper Ten* to make a fair offer for *Manhattan* also. The editor and the publisher determined to get out the paper as best they could without the money Dircks had habitually provided. Sartain decided to print a double instalment of his own serial every week for the present, and, indeed, to write the most of the next number himself, buying nothing from chance contributors, and so utilizing the stock of articles on hand that it would last three or four weeks. The newspapers had announced in the morning that the car-strike was virtually over. He was glad to think that there might be no necessity for him again to comment upon it editorially. So far as possible, he wished to insert in *Manhattan* nothing that Dircks would not approve of. But he no longer felt sure that he could declare the things in which he and the old man were in accord. He wondered how far their apparent agreement had been due to the fact that Dircks did not formulate his opinions, but contented himself with accepting those advanced by the future editor. Yet it struck him as likely also that the divergence between them had been growing wider and wider as Dircks had brooded on his wrongs and as

he had hardened and stiffened in his old age, while Sartain knew himself to be but a young man, gaining in wisdom with experience, already aware that much of his boyish iconoclasm was rather foolish, and willing now to admit that the world cannot be remade at a moment's notice. He saw many abuses to be assaulted, and he was as willing as ever to lead a charge against them, for he was unfailingly hopeful. The old man had lived his life almost to the end, and hope had been buffeted out of him.

The more Sartain reflected the more he thought it likely that *Manhattan* had been supported by Esther's inheritance from her grandmother; and he wondered how it was that he had not suspected this at first. He believed that the old man, having no respect for private property, would unhesitatingly make use of any money which might be under his control. Thinking that wealth ought to belong to him who needs it at the moment, Dircks would attempt no concealment; he would help himself to his daughter's fortune frankly, almost openly, and with no sense of wrongdoing.

Sartain was inclined to think that Esther would bear the loss with perfect fortitude. She had the slim strength of a Toledo blade, and its suppleness. He recalled Johnny's nickname for her, "Miss Cartilage," and dismissed it as absurdly inapplicable. She had the flame of her father, for all that she might seem fragile and ethereal. He doubted even whether she would feel any resentment towards the old man, and whether, indeed, she would not be inclined to accept his views as to the duties and rights of guardians.

He could not but feel his own unworthiness to as-

pire towards a maiden so delicate, so pure, so far above him. He could not but confess his own presumption in thinking it possible that she should ever be taken with him. He could not but acknowledge that he had really nothing to offer her, nothing to tempt her with —nothing except his love. His love was so intense that as he sat there in the little office at the top of the shabby old building in Union Square, as he looked out on the bare trees in the oval park, just making ready to bud forth, he longed for her until his yearning was almost unbearable.

Then he came to a solemn resolution. He would tell her that he loved her, and he would tell her the very first time he saw her. She might refuse him—she would refuse him, no doubt—but at least he would have let her know what his feelings towards her were. To tell her would be an immense relief to him, whatever her answer might be; and he reminded himself that there could be but little uncertainty about it. Young as he was, and hopeful, he had never dared to hope that Esther was interested in him.

In the afternoon he left the office early and walked up-town. He held Vivian to be a friend of good counsel; and he thought it possible that the elder novelist might be able to suggest another possible purchaser for *Manhattan*.

But when he had rung at the door of the apartment, the white-capped maid told him that Mr. Vivian and all three of the young ladies had gone for a drive. Was there any message Mr. Sartain might wish to leave? Mr. Sartain left word that he wanted a few minutes' conversation with Mr. Vivian, and that he would call again the next afternoon.

When the elevator came up to take him down, a young lady stepped out. It was Esther Dircks.

"Oh!" she cried. "How are you, Mr. Sartain?" and a little blush flowered in her cheeks and perished. "Are Dora and Theo in, do you know?"

"I do know they are not in," he answered, "for I have just been told that Mr. Vivian and all three of his daughters have gone out driving."

"Isn't that just like them?" she asked, with her little laugh, so clear, so fine, and so fascinating. "They had asked me to come up for a cup of tea and to talk over their plans for next summer."

"Going down?" called out the elevator-boy, seeing them absorbed in their interest in each other.

As Sartain followed her into the hanging cage, a wave of memory reminded him that the first time he had seen her was in that same elevator, nearly a year and a half ago; and now he was going to tell her that he loved her.

The boy slammed the door and pulled the rope and they started downward. Sartain asked if it was not very early to be making plans for the summer, when the winter had scarcely gone.

"Ah, but the spring has come already, I think," she returned; "don't you? The trees in the Park look as if they were in a hurry to get into their new suits."

"I haven't been into Central Park for three or four months," he answered.

"Haven't you?" she returned. "Then you don't know what you miss. I always try to get two or three good long walks in the Park every week. But I've only had one this week, so far."

As the elevator came to a stop Sartain seized the opportunity.

"Why not come for another one now?" he asked. "That is, if I am not an intruder? If you would not prefer to walk alone?"

"I never walk alone if I can help it," she responded. "I come here and get Dora or Theo or even Johnny."

"And failing them to-day?" he interrogated, holding open the door of the house for her to pass out.

"Failing them," she repeated, smiling, "I shall be pleased to accept your company."

They crossed Fifty-ninth Street and skirted the Park until they came to an entrance of which they could avail themselves. The broad path was asphalted, but this pavement was cracked and broken here and there. It sloped rapidly down to a brick tunnel, which ran under one of the ample driveways. Then it rose again, and it narrowed a little as it came to a graceful bridge which curved over the bridle-path. The walk then bent around the edge of a wide meadow where the grass was greening again. On the shrubbery that fringed the path the buds were already beginning to peep out timidly; the sap was rising once more in the bare trees that branched above them; and on all sides the signs of spring were abundant, as they often are in New York in the first week in April.

The day itself was doubtful; in the morning the sun had come out and shone brightly for an hour or two, but now, in the afternoon, the sky had grayed over as though making ready for rain.

Sartain walked by the side of Esther, saying little or nothing, and leaving her to bear the burden of the talk. He was thinking of what he was going to tell her be-

fore they parted. He meant to speak as soon as an occasion offered; and he intended to make an occasion, if need be. In the meantime, merely to be with her was a joy to him, to listen to her gentle voice, to watch her graceful movements. In trying to find words to fit her, he had found "bird-like motion" and "flower-like face"; and he likened her now to a glancing humming-bird and again to some rare orchid, colorless almost, delicate, exquisite, priceless.

As he said little she let the conversation drop, and they walked along side by side in silence for a hundred yards or more. At last she looked up at him and asked if he did not think her father was looking wretchedly.

"I never saw him as worn as he was last night when he came home to dinner," she said.

Sartain knew that this was probably caused by the controversy in the office of *Manhattan*. "I saw him yesterday," he admitted, "and I must say he seemed to me not so easy in his mind as he used to be—not so placid, I mean."

"That's just it," she agreed. "He used to be so calm always—or, at least, it was very rarely that he ever broke out against wickedness and injustice as he has been doing so often lately."

The young man wondered whether he was right in guessing that her father had wasted her inheritance; he wondered also whether she suspected it.

"Has he had anything special to worry him lately?" he asked.

"I suppose he has," she answered; "indeed, I know he has. He explained to me only last night that the money my grandmother left me—I told you about it,

didn't I?—well, it has been lost. It wasn't very much, but what there was of it was badly invested, so it seems, and it's all gone now. That must be what has been making father so restless lately."

She was truly her father's daughter, Sartain thought, in her disregard of money. She had never really enjoyed her fortune; now that it had departed she seemed to regret the annoyance this had caused her father rather than the loss itself.

A sudden impulse moved him that he could not afterwards explain.

"Do you know what it was your money was invested in?" he asked. "Have you any idea how it was lost?"

"No," she answered. "Father didn't think to tell me. It's gone, he said, and that's all I know."

"It has been spent in trying to establish *Manhattan*," he went on.

She looked up at him questioningly.

"Your father heard me describe the kind of a paper we needed here in New York," he explained, "and so he bought *Manhattan* for me to edit."

"And now it will stop and you will lose your place?" she asked. "Oh, I'm so sorry."

"I can find something else easily enough," he assured her. "But I am put out that it is I who have lost all your money for you."

"You must not mind that," she responded. "I don't believe I should ever have been able to keep it, nor father either; we shouldn't know what to do with money if we had it, really."

"And to think that all these months you have been my boss," he said, "and I didn't know it."

"I did not know it either," she returned.

"And all these months I have been working for you," he continued. Then he held himself in.

They were approaching a part of the Park where there was less privacy. A little boy and a little girl were playing together where the foot-path ran alongside the carriage-road; they were pretending to keep house. The little girl's nurse was standing with her back to the children, turning up her pert and pretty face to the gray-coated mounted policeman who was bending forward to chaff with her. Half a dozen bicyclers flashed past gayly—three men and three girls—trailing light laughter behind them. Along the bridle-path, riding slowly and looking into each other's eyes, came a young man and a young woman; she had a figure that filled out the simple habit, and she knew that she looked well on horseback; he gazed into her eyes as though he thought she would look well under all circumstances; a smug and stolid groom mounted on a rotund cob followed at a discreet distance.

While Esther and Sartain were walking side by side, with resolution urging him on, there was an unexpected spurtle of rain just as the sun broke out on the western sky. People scattered in every direction seeking shelter; children scurried to their nurses; the men and women on horseback broke into a canter to get under the cover of a bridge.

"It won't last long, I think," said Sartain, "but it will spoil your bonnet."

"Oh, this old hat can't be damaged," she responded, cheerfully.

As they turned a corner and passed under a shadeless arbor, they could see that the path dipped down

"THEY HAD THE ARCHWAY ALL TO THEMSELVES"

and under the main road. Just then the rain redoubled.

"There's a good place," cried he, "under the arch there. Shall we run for it?"

"Perhaps it wouldn't be a bad idea," she yielded.

She picked up her skirts and skimmed along lightly. He kept at her side, thinking all at once of Paul and Virginia, and wishing that he could shield her with a huge banana-leaf.

They came to the mouth of the tunnel, breathless.

"That was fun, wasn't it?" she asked. "I do love to be in the rain, don't you?"

"I love to be anywhere that you are," he answered, but at that moment a heavy carriage rumbled overhead, and he doubted if she had heard him.

They had the archway all to themselves, except for two or three little children who were huddled together at the other end, impatient to be away again.

Now that the time had come at last, Sartain could not find his tongue. He straightened himself, and he took a long breath; he pulled at the point of his beard, twisting it nervously.

Again a vehicle of some sort rolled over their heads with a sound like the muttering of distant thunder.

Esther looked up at him, gravely. There was more color on her cheeks than usual, but he set this down to her sharp run.

"Mr. Sartain," she began, "if *Manhattan* is going to stop, what will become of the story—the serial, I mean—*A Wolf at the Door?*"

"It will have to stop, too, probably," he answered. "But it will be published as a book, sooner or later."

"I'm so glad!" she returned.

"Why?" he asked.

"Why?" she repeated. "Oh, I don't know. Because it interested me, I suppose."

Sartain wondered if she had recognized herself in the heroine. But before he could frame his question, she went on:

"Do you know who is writing it?" she asked.

"Who is writing what?" he inquired, in turn.

"Who is the author of *A Wolf at the Door?*" she explained. "I thought that editors always knew who the authors were of the things they published?"

"Don't you know who wrote that story?" he asked, in amazement.

"Of course I don't," she answered. "How should I know?"

He looked at her in astonishment.

"You mustn't stare at me like that," she said. "It may be very ignorant of me, but I've no idea who 'S. Francis' is."

Then Sartain perceived how it was that she was not aware of his authorship.

"The Francis is for Frank," he said, "and the S. stands for Sartain."

The color deepened on her cheek, and her eyes were lowered.

"I did not know that," she responded.

"And now you know it," he went on, seizing the opportunity, "you will forgive me for having taken you for my heroine. I know it was a great liberty, but I could not help it—really, I couldn't."

"You couldn't help it?" she repeated. "Why not?" But she did not raise her eyes.

"Because I loved you so much that you were the

only woman I could think of at all," he answered. "I had to put you in the book. I couldn't have kept you out if I had tried—and I wouldn't try."

He paused; he thought that he saw her tremble a little.

"I do love you," he went on. "I have loved you ever since that first day I saw you at Mr. Vivian's, when you were on the table as Cinderella. I could not keep it to myself any longer. Now you know."

"Yes," she repeated. "Now I know;" and she looked at him again.

He caught hope from this glance.

"I know I am not worthy of you," he urged; "but if you could only care for me a little—if it were ever so little at first—"

She dropped her eyes once more and her color deepened as she said, "I think I do care now—a little."

They did not know how long they sat there under the bridge, with the carriages rumbling above them. The flurry of rain was over soon, and the setting sun shone out strong and red; the children at the other end of the tunnel ran out again to play, and went home at last; and still the young lovers lingered.

When they did emerge once more into the full light of day, the afternoon was almost spent. As they were slowly retracing their steps up the incline they had swiftly run down in the rain, they heard the winding of a horn. Over the bridge, high above them, a four-in-hand coach rolled past, with a gay company filling its seats—Mr. Vivian, his daughters, and two or three more. Sartain and Esther looked up, and Johnny looked down and saw them standing there, hand in hand.

CHAPTER XXIII

It was the beginning of April that Frank Sartain told Esther Dircks he loved her, and it was at the end of May that they were married. They had known each other for eighteen months, and when they discovered each the love of the other, they saw no reason for a longer engagement. There was even a motive for haste to be found in the condition of her father's health.

Dircks had made no protest against his daughter's engagement, and apparently he bore no malice against Sartain. He was getting feebler; his tall frame was bent now, and his broad hands often twitched nervously. It was as though the flame had burned out and left the old man almost without interest in life. He was no longer able to retouch a block with his old skill, and it was not likely that he could provide for his own support. Fortunately Sartain and Truax were able finally to sell *Manhattan* to the new owner of the *Upper Ten* on advantageous terms; and by Esther's wish the money received was invested so that it would be a reserve fund in case Dircks was wholly unable to earn his living.

Fortunately, also, Sartain stepped promptly into another situation. The senior partner of the house that had published *Dust and Ashes* had liked the way in

which the young author had prepared that volume for the press, and the practical suggestions he had made for the design, which served as a cover-stamp and also as a poster. He told Sartain that he would issue *A Wolf at the Door* on the same terms as the earlier story; and that there having been no profit in *Dust and Ashes* did not prejudice him against the later tale. And he did more than agree to publish the young man's second book. When a little old gentleman died about the first of May, who had advised them for at least two generations of the firm, he asked Vivian if Sartain would not be a good man to attach permanently to the fortunes of the house. Vivian approved of the suggestion heartily; and the publishers thereupon offered Sartain a position with a good salary and with full liberty to employ his leisure in literature.

Thus it was that Sartain felt his future assured when he met Esther at the altar of the Little Church Down the Street. He had asked Truax to be his best man, and Vivian's three daughters were the bridesmaids.

After the ceremony, Vivian invited them all to luncheon in his ample apartments—the bride and her father, the groom and his best man, and half a dozen other stray young fellows. At table Adams was a little moody now and then, and when he aroused himself his gayety was a little factitious. Sartain knew that the news of Esther's engagement had been a sudden shock to the artist; but now it seemed to the man who had won that the man who had lost was bearing the blow bravely. It struck him also that the twins, often so personal in their passages of arms with Adams, were less boisterous than usual, and that they

were even considerate, not to say sympathetic, in their attitude towards the disappointed lover. The father of the twins had been so cordial in his congratulations that Sartain doubted whether he had not been altogether wrong in thinking that Vivian was also in love with Esther, all unconscious as he believed this affection to be.

At last the repast came to an end, and Sartain was able to carry away his bride. She clung to her father and wept over him for a minute, and then suffered herself to be separated from him. Sartain was waiting for her at the door of the elevator. Down-stairs, on the sidewalk, Johnny was the last to kiss her good-bye, just before she stepped into the carriage, after shaking off the rice plentifully besprinkled over her. As the bride and groom drove off the twins leaned out of the windows of the apartment, and cast after them half a dozen old ball slippers.

The wedding trip was to be limited to a fortnight, as Sartain had to be back in New York by the middle of June, and the young couple were going to spend their two weeks in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, cities that neither of them had seen.

When they came out on the upper deck of the ferry-boat, Sartain drew a long breath of exultation. Now at last he was bearing Esther away from everybody to have her all to himself. He gazed down at her with abounding joy, and she returned the look of love.

He told her how he had come to New York, with what hopes and fears, and how he had met his fate that very first day in the great city. It was love at first sight, if ever there were a case; and he would never again

doubt the possibility. Then he asked her if she could recall the occasion when she began to feel any interest in him; and, to his surprise and delight, she confessed that it was also on the first day they had met.

"I don't suppose I really loved you then," she explained, shyly; "not as I do now—of course not. But I was strangely drawn to you, and I didn't think that you thought of me at all!"

"But I did!" he protested.

"You didn't show it," she rejoined.

"I didn't think of anybody else," he asserted.

"You weren't half as attentive to me as you were to Johnny," she returned.

"But I wasn't afraid of her," he declared.

"And you were afraid of me?" she asked. "What was so very terrible about me?"

"You were always gracious and kind," he responded; "but I was timid. I suppose being in love makes some men shyer than ever."

"Yes," she admitted, "I did think you were very shy."

"Didn't you see that was all your fault?" he insisted. "It was all because I lost my head completely when I looked at you."

"I thought you didn't look at me very often," she answered, "and I don't think now you looked at me half as often as you did at Johnny."

"But I wasn't afraid of Johnny," he repeated.

"You ought to have been," she said, slyly, but with a little flash of her eye.

"Why?" he inquired. "I don't see that. She was always very friendly. I—I used to tell her how much I loved you."

"Did you?" said Esther, with a laugh. "I don't think she would enjoy that. But then a man would never know any better."

"A man wouldn't know any better about what?" he returned.

"Oh, never mind," she answered; "you wouldn't understand."

"Try me," he urged.

"Did you mean to make me jealous by flirting with Johnny?" she asked, suddenly.

"Never!" he assured her. "Never! I hope you cannot believe that I would be guilty of such a thing. It—it wouldn't have been fair to her either."

"Oh, Johnny can take care of herself," Esther returned. "She made me think you were in love with her."

"Do you mean to say that she told you that?" he asked, in astonishment.

"Oh, dear no," she responded. "It wasn't necessary to do that. She didn't do anything to make me think so, she just let me think it, that's all. And you helped her so!"

"I helped her?" he echoed.

"That song you sang at the studio that hateful night when we had all those absurd messes," she said; "didn't you sing that right at her?"

"I?" he returned. "Why, I was thinking of you with every note I sang. It seemed to me as though I were declaring my love to you before them all."

"I didn't know that then. I wish I had," she replied.

"I wish you had, too," said he. "If you loved

me then, why, we might have been married months ago!"

Esther paid no attention to this remark.

"I wish I had known it then," she said. "Of course, I saw she was trying to get you."

"To get me?" he asked, in astonishment.

"She was trying all she knew how," Esther returned. "And she knew I was watching her, too!"

"What do you mean?" he asked. "Why should she want me?"

"She was in love with you," was Esther's direct answer.

"With me?" he repeated. "Impossible!"

"You dear old stupid," said the bride. "Didn't you see that?"

"No," he replied. "I never suspected it. Are you—are you sure of it?"

"Of course I am," she responded. And she looked up at him with her irresistible smile.

He looked down at her with a little laugh of sheer physical delight in life. Then he took her unresisting hand and tucked her arm under his; and they slowly paced the broad promenade as the boat pushed off and thrust itself out of the slip. He felt as though he and she were now beginning the voyage of life together.

The sky was golden with hope, and there was scarcely a breeze to ripple the sparkling surface of the broad river. He remembered that he had entered New York by that same water-gate, not two years before. Then he was a stranger in a strange land; and now he was a citizen of no mean city. Then he was alone and lonely; and now he had his bride by his side.

Then the mighty outline of New York had towered above him like a frowning fortress, to be besieged and taken by storm at last; and now as he looked back at the roofs and spires and lofty domes of the metropolis the profile was forbidding no longer, but friendly and inviting.

THE END

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